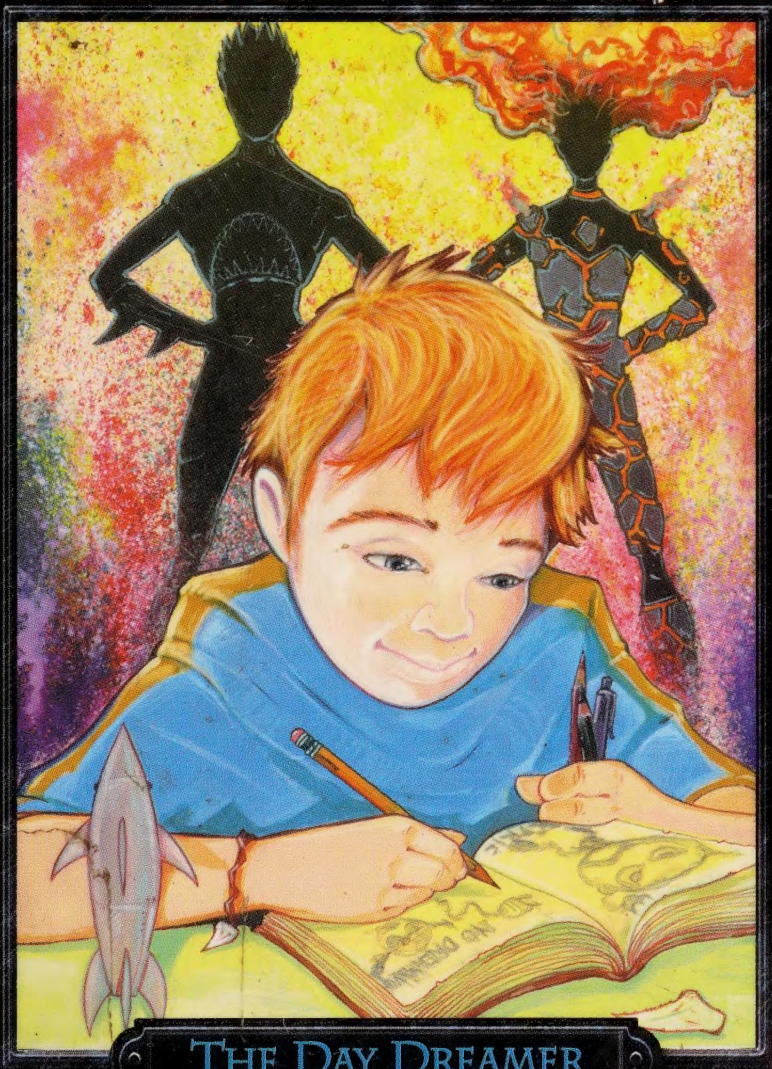
SHARKBOY AND LAVAGIRL ADVENTURES



VOL.1

THE DAY DREAMER

ROBERT RODRIGUEZ
AND
CHRIS ROBERSON

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SHARKBOY AND LAVAGIRL ADVENTURES

BOOK 1
THE DAY DREAMER

BY
ROBERT RODRIGUEZ
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SHARK BOY AND LAVA GIRL ADVENTURES:
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ACROSS A SEA OF STARS
AND NINE SEAS OF DREAMS
IT IS NOT TOO FAR
AND IT'S NOT TOO CLOSE,
IT COULD BE AS FAR
AS THE TIP OF YOUR NOSE
IT'S A PLANET OF FUN
WHERE ALL THE KIDS RULE
IT'S A DAYDREAMER'S PLACE
IT'S CALLED PLANET DROOL.

MOON
EARTH
VOLCANO
MIND FIELDS
EMERGENT SEA
AVALON
VENT
MOUNT NEVEREST
REG. RIDES
MIX. RIDES
GAMES
RIDES
EXPRESS
COOL RIDES
FUN
PRIZES
DREAM GRAVEYARD
NOCTURNE CAVERNS
WATCH IT!
PASSAGE of TIME
PLANET DROOL
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THE ABOVE TRUE NUMBERS ARE YOUR POINT OF START.
DREAM ACROSS THE SOUTHERN SKIES AND YOU'LL SEE THE MARK
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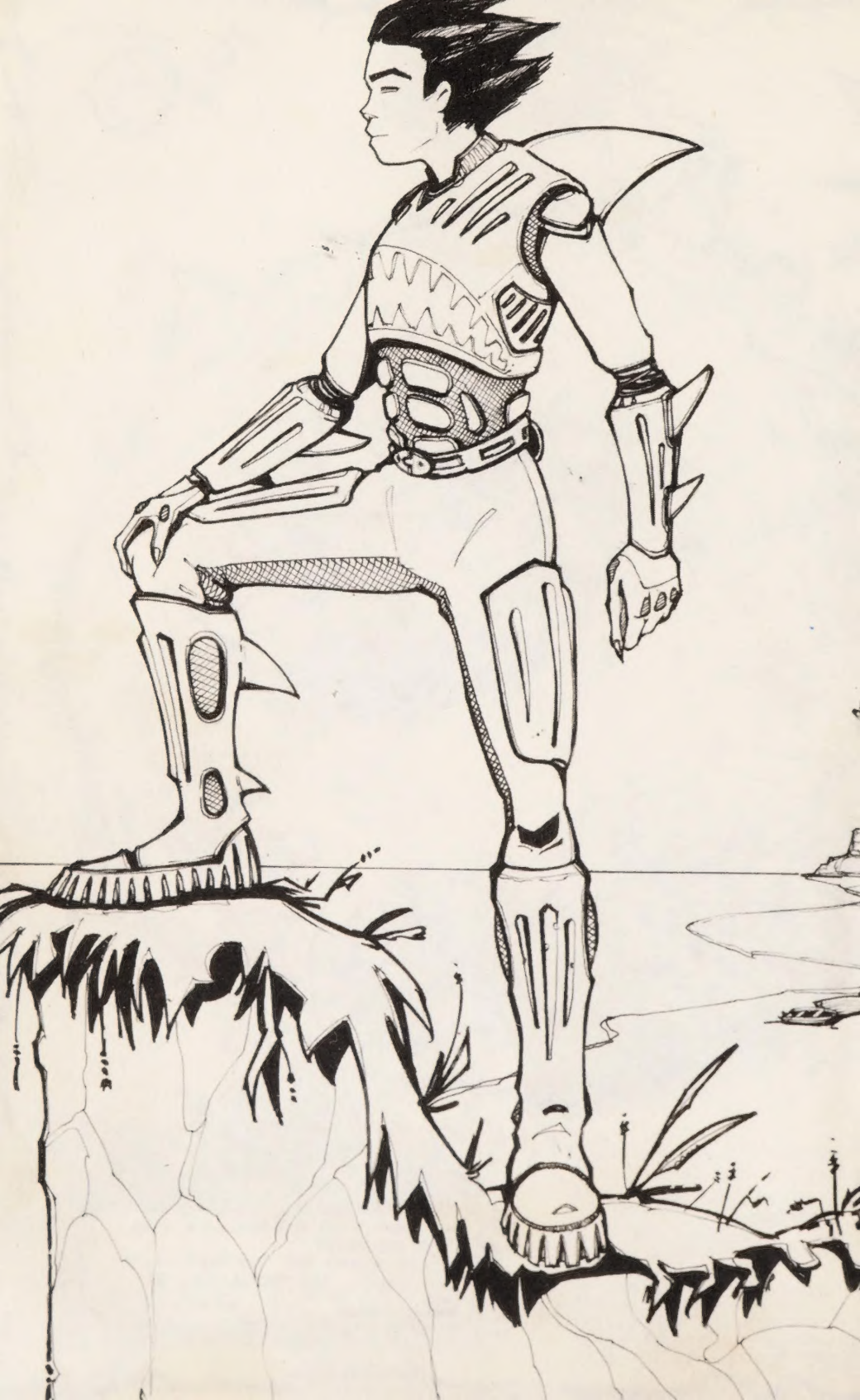


CHAPTER ONE

When he opened his eyes, all the boy saw was the frozen ocean in front of him, a single sheet of ice stretching out to the horizon. He sat on the gray, sandy shore, which extended to his left and right as far as the eye could see. Behind him was a long line of dunes, following the curve of the beach in both directions. Overhead, the sky was divided neatly in two, half of it as dark as night, the other half the same gray as the beach sand, like an overcast day just before a rain. Where the two halves met was a distinct line, like a seam in the sky.

Frozen ocean, endless beach, two-tone sky—none of it could be natural, he knew. So where was he?"

That was the first problem. The boy

had no idea where he was. He couldn't remember seeing any place like it before.

That was the *second* problem, actually. He couldn't remember seeing *anything* before. He couldn't remember anything, period.

He had no idea at all who he was.

The boy climbed unsteadily to his feet, dusting sand off the backs of his legs. He seemed to be wearing a sort of diving suit. Silver and black, it had fins on his forearms, on his back, and on the backs of his calves. Was he some kind of swimmer? If so, then why the claws on the ends of each finger?

On his wrists were controls, little buttons and toggle switches, so small he almost didn't notice them. But before he could test them to see what they did, he heard an earsplitting scream. It was coming from the other side of the dunes behind him. It sounded like a girl, and she was in trouble!

Instinctively, without thinking about it, the boy took off running up the side of the dune. He just had to help. He didn't have a choice.

When he got to the crest of the dune and could see down the other side, he was brought up short. Whatever he'd been expecting to see, *this* wasn't it.

In amongst little tufts of grass in the gray sands on the far side of the dunes, there was a girl, standing in the middle of a large circle of ashes. She was wearing a strange suit of orange, purple, and pink. But her odd choice of clothing wasn't the most surprising thing about her.

She was on fire.

Purple flames danced on the girl's head, and orange lava dripped from her fingertips. Her mouth was open in a big "O," and when she saw the boy she stopped her wordless shriek, took a deep breath, and screamed: "Help me! I'm on fire!"

The boy would have thought that was obvious, but this was hardly the time to nitpick. Driven by the same instinct to help and protect he'd felt before, he raced down the side of the dune, rushing towards the girl. He didn't know what he could do to help, but he wasn't going to wait around to figure it out. The girl needed assistance, and she needed it *now*.

The closer he got to the girl, though, the hotter it got. The flames that covered her head and burned in her hands flared bright, and with every step the boy took he could feel himself growing weaker and weaker. He could feel himself losing his strength, and his mouth had become dry as a desert. Finally, he took one last step, and found that he couldn't bring himself to move forward another inch. The skin on his face felt dry and stretched, and his suddenly chapped lips started to crack.

He was losing water. If he lost too

much more, he wasn't sure if he'd be able to survive.

The boy dropped to his knees. He kept his eyes on the girl, wishing he could do something to help but powerless to get any closer.

The girl suddenly stopped screaming. Though she was still on fire, her posture relaxed, and her face took on a confused expression.

"You know what?" the girl said, more to herself than to the boy. "I'm on fire, but it doesn't hurt."

She moved her hands back and forth in front of her face, the hot lava dripping off them and spattering with a hiss on the sand at her feet.

"I don't appear to be burning, either," the girl said. She shrugged. "That is *weird*."

The girl looked at the boy, who still knelt on the sand just a short distance away.

"Who are you?" the girl asked.

The boy wanted to say that he didn't know, that he didn't know *anything*. But when he tried to speak, his voice only came out as a croak. He sounded like a wounded frog.

The boy swallowed what little moisture was left in his mouth, and tried again.

"Too . . . dry . . ." was all he managed to say.

The boy thought about the ocean, and turned to glance back at the dune behind him. But the shore was too far away for him to reach, and the water trapped beneath a giant sheet of ice.

"Water . . ." the boy croaked.

The world began to spin in front of the boy's eyes, and then everything went black.

Chapter Two

When the boy next opened his eyes, the world in front of him shimmered in shades of green and blue. He couldn't remember ever feeling better.

Considering that all he could remember was a brief span of a couple of minutes, that wasn't saying much, but still it beat the way he'd felt just a short while before.

But how short a while had it been? He must have passed out, and woken up somewhere else. But where?

The boy tried to move his arms and legs, and realized with a start that he was underwater. He panicked, suddenly fighting for breath, before he realized that he was already breathing. Breathing underwater!

The shimmering greens and blues he saw before him were underwater currents, moving under the white sheet of ice overhead. The boy looked up, and saw a patch of gray sky. He was only a few feet below the surface of the water. Instinctively, he kicked his legs, and rocketed to the surface.

The boy's head came above water, and he saw that he was floating in the center of a hole burned in the ice. On the gray beach, a short distance away, stood the girl he'd seen before. She was no longer on fire, her pink hair blowing around her head in the slight breeze.

"I'm glad that worked," the girl said, stepping to the edge of the water. "Your suit looked like it was designed to work underwater, and I had to take a chance."

The boy swam to the edge of the melted hole, and climbed out onto the ice. A few steps carried him back to the shore. He shivered after being in the cold

water, but he felt refreshed, like the water had restored all of his lost energy, and more.

The boy's cheek stung in the breeze, and when he reached up to feel it, he found that there was a long burn mark running along the edge of his chin. He touched the burn gingerly.

"Sorry about that," the girl said sheepishly. She seemed to draw into herself a little, like a turtle pulling its head into its shell. "I couldn't figure out how to turn off the flames before I picked you up, and your cheek brushed my shoulder." She paused, an anxious look on her face. "I don't . . . I don't really remember who I am. I just hope I'm not somebody . . . destructive. I don't know why anyone would want to go around shooting lava out of their hands all the time."

The boy glanced at her hands, which seemed pretty regular at the moment.

The girl followed his look, and

nodded.

"Yeah, I figured out how to cool off, but only after I'd carried you down here."

The boy nodded.

"That's okay," he said. "I don't know who I am, either. I don't know anything, for that matter. I woke up alone here on the beach, and I don't remember anything that happened before."

"Well," the girl said, "whatever you are must have something to do with water. There's how you're dressed, for one, but for another, just look at how a quick soak in the cold water healed you so quickly."

The boy looked at the ocean. The hole the girl had burned in the ice sheet was already starting to freeze over again.

"Who knows?" he said. "Maybe I live underwater. I can breathe down there, after all. Hey, maybe I'm even the king of the oceans, with an army of sea creatures to command."

The girl crossed her arms and raised

an eyebrow.

"Well," she said sarcastically, "as long as you're keeping your sights low."

"Hey," the boy said defensively, "who do you think you are? Queen of the lava people?"

Before the girl could answer, there came from behind them a loud noise. It sounded like a freight train giving birth to a litter of eighteen-wheeler trucks—metal on metal, gears and motors. Above the dune hills rose a cloud of steam, followed by a high-pitched whistle. Then, at the crest of the dune, there appeared a huge, mechanical monstrosity.

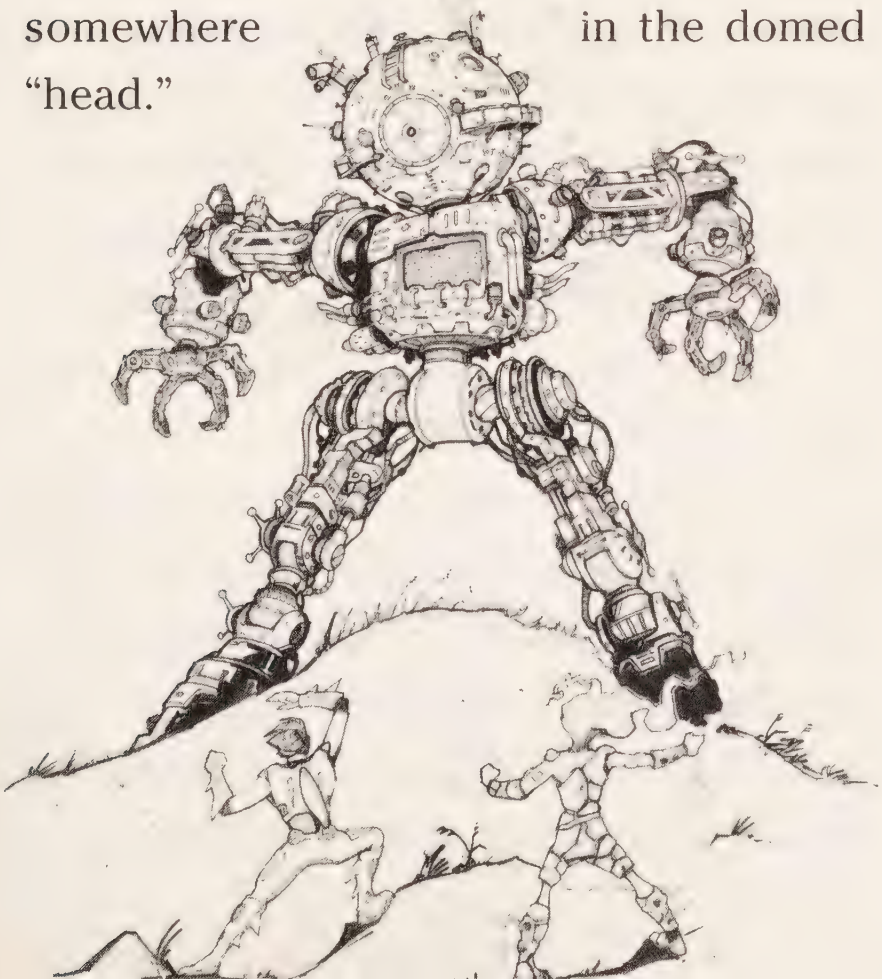
It was shaped somewhat like a man. Standing more than twenty feet tall, it was all brass and rivets, and steam poured from the joints in its "arms" and "legs" every time it moved. Instead of a head, it had a large dome of steel girders and brass plates.

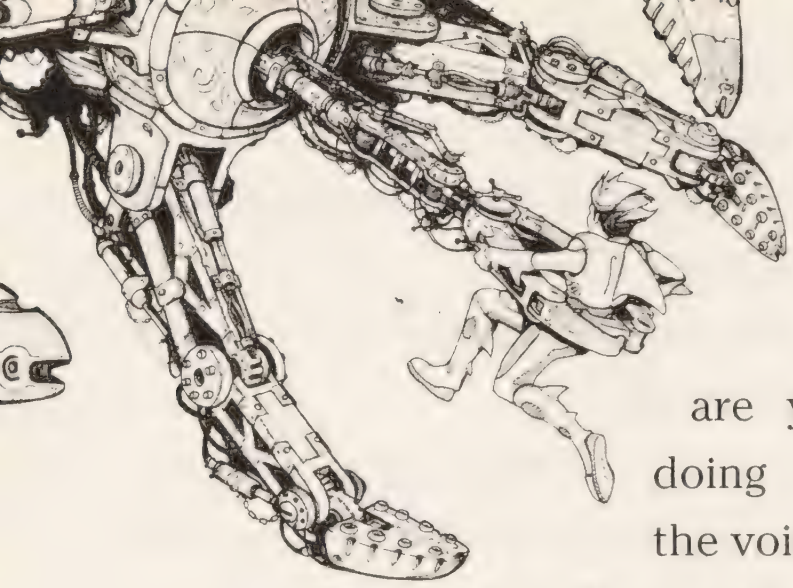
Before the boy and girl could react,

before they could even blink, the mechanical monstrosity started down the hill at top speed. It was heading right for them!

The boy and girl instinctually took a defensive stance.

As the machine raced towards them, steam pouring out from every joint, the brass legs pounding on the gray sand, a voice blared from speakers hidden somewhere in the domed "head."





"What are you two doing here?" the voice said.

The girl, without thinking, threw a handful of hot lava at the machine, as fast and accurate as a baseball pitcher. The lava hit the machine square in the chest and was deflected without doing any major damage, though it left a faint scorch mark on the metal.

"Hey, hold on, now!" the voice from the machine said.

The machine was now close enough to reach out and grab hold of the girl. The girl didn't have time to move before the metal arms were wrapped around her. She was lifted off the ground a few inches, her arms pinned to her sides, immobilized.

The boy, seeing his new friend attacked, felt a rage building up inside of him. The world went red in front of his eyes, and he felt his instincts take over.

He went into a frenzy, and swiped his claws at the machine's legs with as much force as he could muster. But the best the boy could do was cut a few gouges in the hard metal of the machine's outer hull before the other metal arm wrapped around his waist and lifted him in the air beside the girl. Both he and the girl were now trapped, unable to move. Powerless in the arms of the giant machine!

Chapter Three

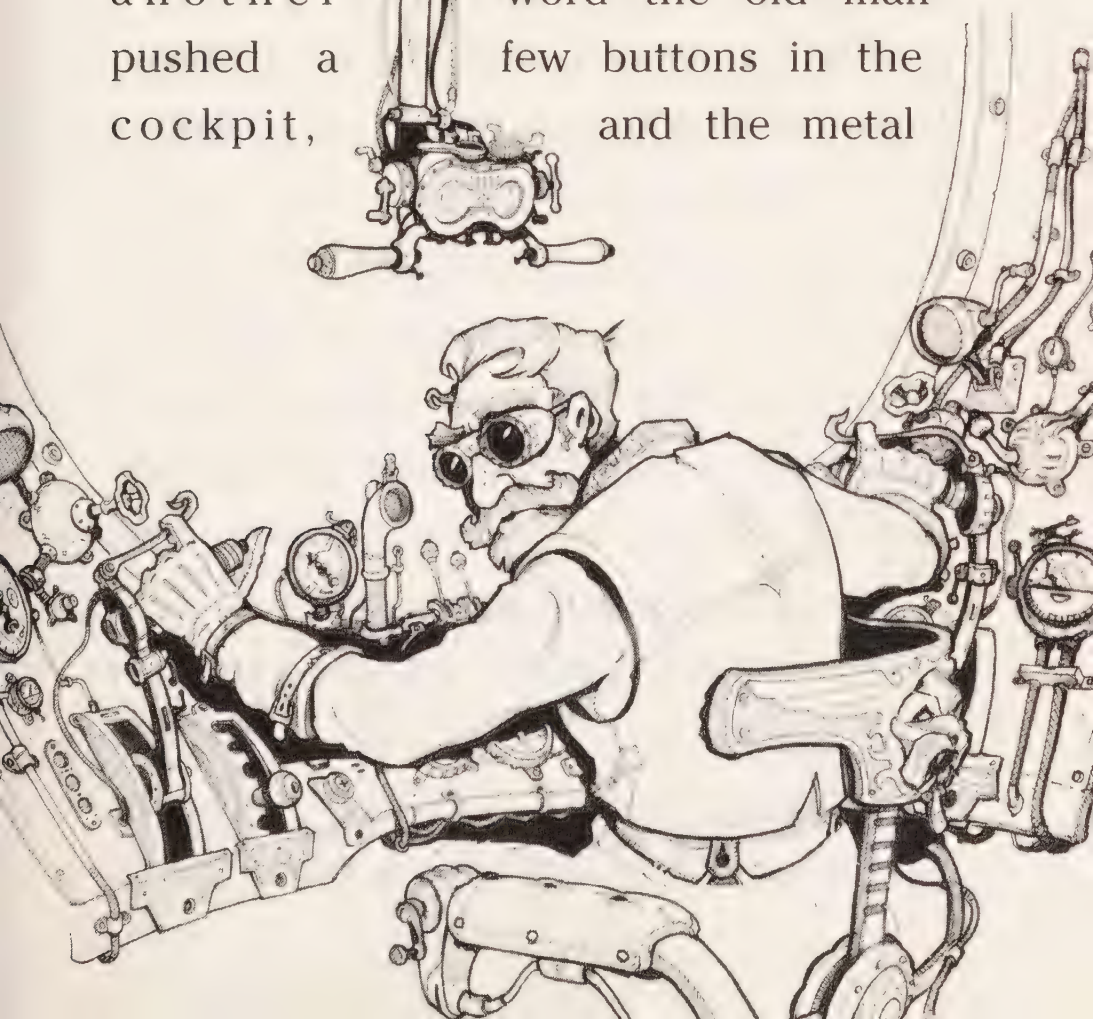
With a hiss of steam, the top of the machine opened up, the brass dome folding back on itself like a flower blooming in reverse. Another dome was revealed beneath, this one of thick glass. Behind the glass was an old man sitting in a cockpit, working gears and levers with both hands. He was dressed like someone from the nineteenth century, with handlebar mustaches and a little beard, string tie, suspenders, and smoked-glass goggles.

The old man looked out at the boy and girl, dangling in midair in the machine's metal arms.

"Now if I put you down, we won't have any more of this foolishness, will we?" the old man said, his lips moving in

synch with the voice booming from the loudspeakers. "We don't have time for any more delays, you know."

The boy and girl looked at one another, and stopped struggling. They didn't seem to be able to break loose, so there wasn't any reason not to go along with the old man for now, if it meant that they'd be set free. They nodded, and without another word the old man pushed a few buttons in the cockpit, and the metal



arms relaxed their hold on them. They fell down hard on the cold sand, landing on their backsides.

"Now," the old man went on, "come with me. Quickly now—there isn't much time left to us."

The boy and the girl climbed to their feet, and looked up at the old man.

"Who are you, anyway?" the boy asked guardedly.

The old man sighed, sounding like a heavy wind through the loudspeakers, and he shook his head sadly.

"I'd hoped the Darkness hadn't affected you yet," he said, "but it appears that was not to be." The old man paused, and sat up straighter in his seat. He pulled a lever in front of him, and the machine knelt down in the sand with creaking, steam-hissing joints, bringing the old man nearer their eye level.

"If I had a name, long ago . . . and I must have. What creature does not have

a name?" The old man paused, and the boy wasn't sure if he expected an answer or not. But before the boy or girl could respond, the old man continued. "In any event, if I had a name, I've long forgotten it by now. Most people, if they call me anything at all, call me the Imagineer."

The old man leaned closer, and pursed his lips.

"That's what you called me, I should point out, before you forgot about me," he said. "But then, I imagine you've forgotten a great many things, haven't you?"

"You can say that again," the boy answered.

"We don't remember anything," the girl said. "Not who we are, or where we are, or anything."

The old man nodded gravely.

"Well," he said, "I can answer some of the questions you must have, but then we must be on our way, and quickly. First, as to who you are, you"—he pointed to

the boy—"are Shark Boy. And you"—he pointed to the girl—"are Lava Girl. This place is the Realm of Dreams, which is currently known by the sobriquet of Planet Drool."

The boy tried to follow what the old man was saying, but it seemed like not all of the words would fit into his ears at one time.

"Soab . . ." the boy called Shark Boy said, trying to sound it out. "Sobra . . ."

"Sobriquet, son," the Imagineer interrupted. "It's just a fancy way of saying 'name,' which I would have said if I wasn't so in love with the sound of my own voice. But, unfortunately for you, my own voice is one of my favorite sounds in all existence, so you're stuck with my lexicon and circumlocutions for the duration."

Before Shark Boy or the girl called Lava Girl could ask, the Imagineer raised a hand.

"'Circumlocutions' means 'a roundabout way of speaking,'" the Imagineer said, "and lexicon means 'vocabulary,' but now is not the time. Suffice it to say that this is the Realm of Dreams, which in this day and age is known as Planet Drool. You two, Shark Boy and Lava Girl, are its heroes and champions. You are also, I hasten to add, dreams yourselves."

"How can we be dreams?" Lava Girl asked.

"I don't feel asleep," Shark Boy said.

"There are many kinds of beings that exist only in the Realm of Dreams. Some of them are born here, some of them have always been here, and some of them are the dream-selves of people in the Waking World. When people of singular wills or strong imaginations pass on, too, sometimes their dream-selves can continue to exist apart from them, living their own lives in dreams."

"But which are we?" Shark Boy asked.

The Imagineer shrugged, a sad expression on his face. "That," he said, "I am afraid I cannot say."

Shark Boy looked from the old man to his new friend Lava Girl and back again. None of them seemed like they were dreams, and this place certainly seemed real enough. But how else could he explain the strange things he'd seen—the frozen ocean, the girl on fire, himself breathing underwater?

"But now is not the time for more questions," the Imagineer said. "You must come with me, and quickly. There's little time left to save the Realm of Dreams. The Darkness is about to fall, and only the two of you can stop it."

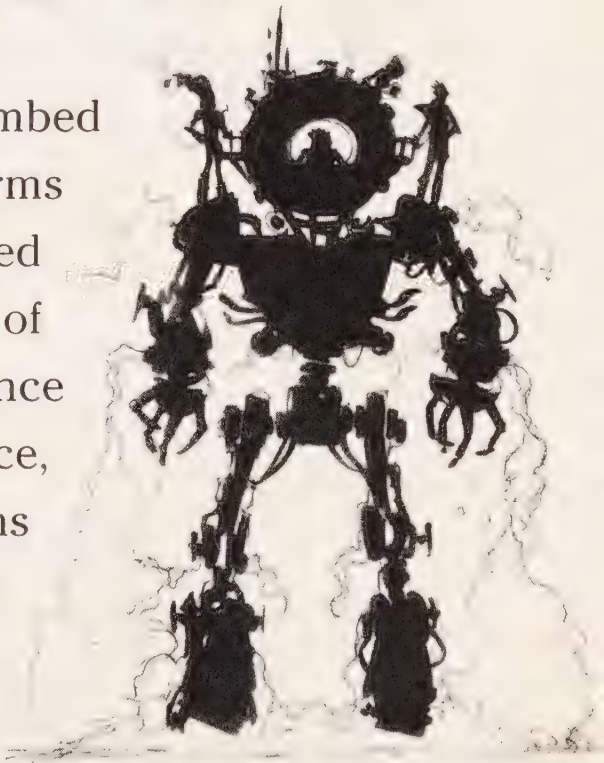
"What is the Darkness?" Lava Girl said.

"There isn't time to explain now," the Imagineer said. He pulled a few levers, and the metal arms of the machine stretched

out towards the two again. The arms straightened out when the ends touched the ground, so that they were almost like two ramps leading up either side of the machine. "Climb on, and I'll explain en route."

Shark Boy and Lava Girl glanced at each other, and shrugged. The old man didn't act like he meant them any harm. And he seemed to know what was going on. Better to go with him and find some answers, than to stay by the shores of the frozen ocean with all of their questions.

The two climbed up the metal arms until they reached the shoulder of the machine. Once they were in place, the metal arms folded up around their legs, gently



holding them in place. Then, the machine squatted down on its massive mechanical legs, and with a huge eruption of steam, it leapt into the air. It soared hundreds of feet, up and over the dunes and far away, before it came back down again to earth. But as soon as its heavy treads touched the ground again, it bounced back up, another giant leap.

With Shark Boy and Lava Girl clinging to the sides, the machine bounded through the air like an enormous rabbit, covering the ground faster than they would have thought possible. But where were they going? And why?

Chapter Four

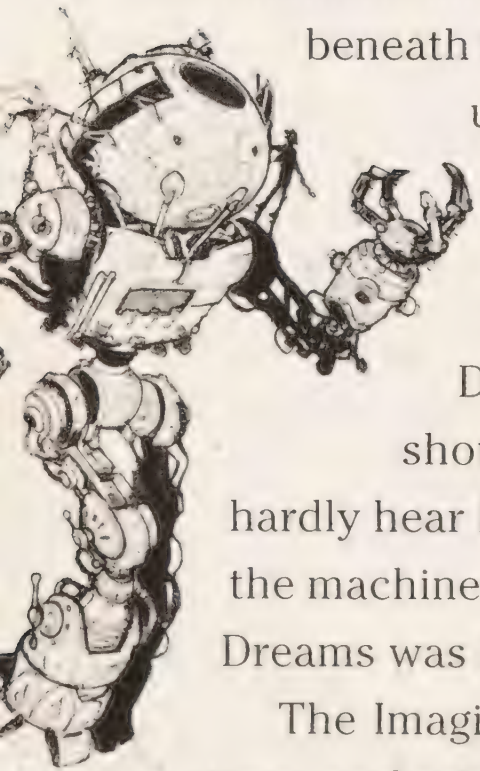
As they traveled, the ground rushing beneath them with every leap the machine made, the Imagineer told them about Planet Drool. The wind rushed in their ears, but the loudspeakers were mounted close enough to each shoulder that they could hear most of what the old man said without difficulty.

"The landscape hereabouts is much changed from when I last saw it," the Imagineer said, a sad tone in his voice. "So much is new; so much is different. I spend most of my time underground with the older dreams, nowadays, and only rarely do I come to the surface. Still, it is my home."

"What kind of name is Drool for a planet, anyway?" Shark Boy asked, having

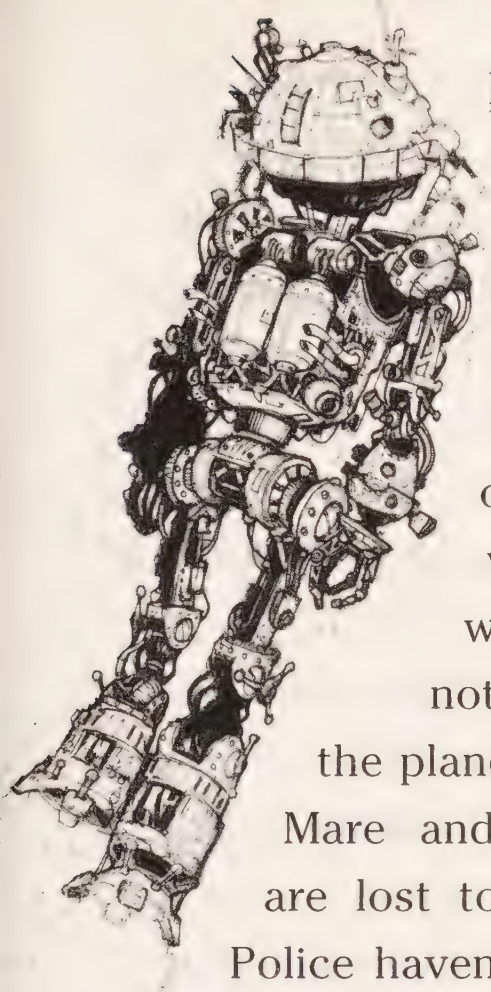
to cup his hands around his mouth and shout over the rush of the wind to be heard.

"Planet Drool is just the most recent name for the Realm of Dreams," the Imagineer answered, "given to it by the Day Dreamer of the current age. Previous names have included Nod, Never Land, Slumberland, Elysium, Otherworld . . . The list goes on. Here is where the dreams of all mankind connect, down beneath the surface, a collective unconscious shared by all dreamers."



"You said something about the Darkness," Lava Girl shouted. Shark Boy could hardly hear her on the other side of the machine. "You said the Realm of Dreams was in danger. Why?"

The Imagineer paused for a long time, and when he answered, Shark



Boy could hear pain in his voice.

"Someone is erasing all of the dreams from the face of Planet Drool, one at a time. That's what the Darkness is: a wave of destruction and nothingness passing over the planet. Already the Knight Mare and Colonel Knowledge are lost to us, and the Dream Police haven't been seen in days. Forgotten dreams are discarded in the Dream Graveyard, or imprisoned in the Dungeon if they stand a chance of resisting."

Shark Boy realized something.

"Hey," he shouted, tapping on the glass dome to get the old man's attention. "How come we haven't seen anyone else around?"

"There are few dreams abroad these days," the Imagineer said. "Even the dream-selves of the Waking World's children are imprisoned in Mount Never Rest, endlessly circling. No one knows who is behind the Darkness, but with the Realm of Dreams so far out of balance, the only person who can set things right is the Day Dreamer."

"Who is that?" Lava Girl asked.

The Imagineer looked from her on one side, to Shark Boy on the other, and back again.

"I'm sorry that there isn't time to explain things more fully," the old man said. "I truly am. For now, it is enough to say that everything you see around you is here because the Day Dreamer dreamed it into existence. Normally he is the center of our world, but now he is nowhere to be found on Planet Drool. Whoever is causing the Darkness has broken the Day Dreamer's connection with the Realm of

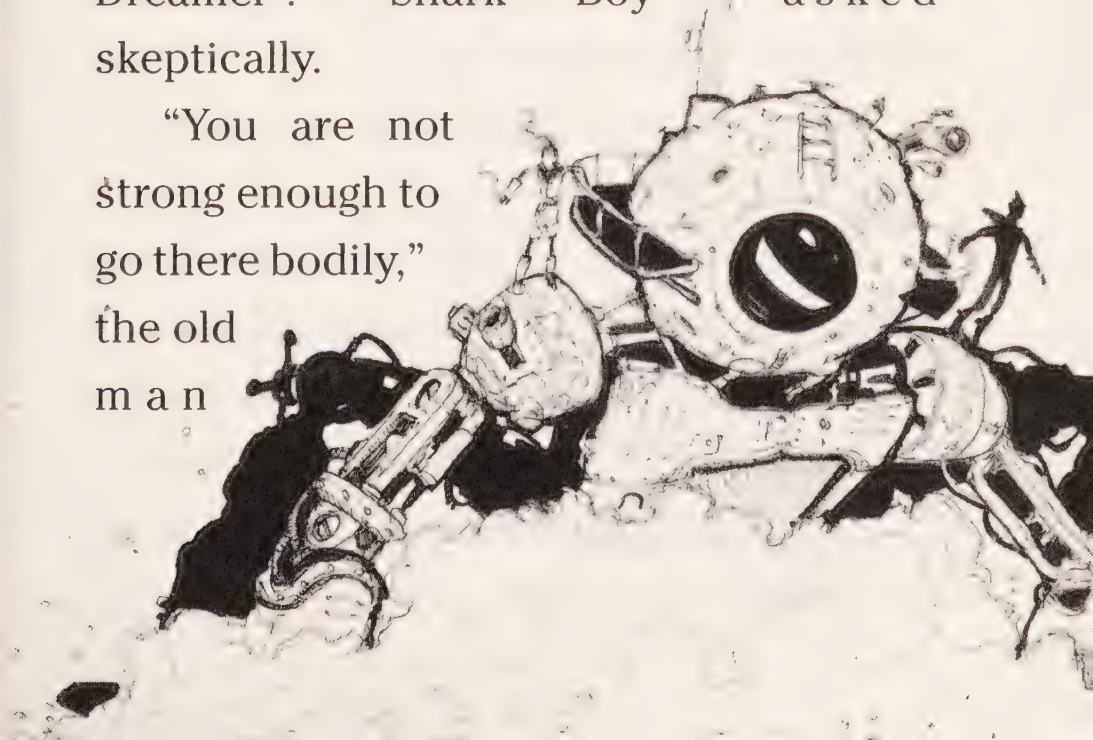
Dreams, so that now he can only be found in the Waking World."

The Imagineer paused, like he was remembering something that he'd forgotten a long time ago. It was a long moment before he continued.

"For every person in the Waking World there is a dream-self," the Imagineer finally continued. "What you two must do is journey to the edges of the Waking World, and return with the dream-self of the Day Dreamer. If you do not, all is lost."

"How do we find this . . . 'Day Dreamer'?" Shark Boy asked skeptically.

"You are not strong enough to go there bodily," the old man



answered. "Very few are powerful enough to move between the Waking World and the Realm of Dreams with ease. Once I might have been able to send you there myself, but that time is long past. I'm just an old dream now, long past any usefulness. I can't open the door to the Waking World myself, as I no longer have a connection to it." The Imagineer sighed, and twisted the ends of his mustache between his thumb and forefinger. "If there were time, I might bring you to one of the Twilight Places, which you could use to travel bodily to the Waking World. But there simply isn't time."

"What's that?" Lava Girl said. "What are the . . . Twilight Places?"

"There are places where it is easier to navigate the divide between the worlds of waking and of dreams. Where it is easier to break the membrane that separates the two. These are places that exist in both worlds at once, waking and dreaming—

lost islands, high mountains, hidden cities. Places like Avalon, Shamballah, Olympus, the city of Vent. But they are always difficult to reach, the journey to them long and hard, and we don't have the time. Instead, you must go the quicker and more dangerous route. You must go through the Mind Fields, the dangerous middle ground between waking and sleeping."

"Hey," Shark Boy said, trying to sound brave. "What's the worst that could happen?"

The Imagineer looked at Shark Boy, and drew his mouth into a tight line.

"Believe me, Shark Boy," he said, "you don't want to know what the worst possibilities are. I will tell you only this: Compared to the dangers that await you, should you lose yourself in the Mind Fields, death is one of the best-case scenarios."

Shark Boy swallowed hard, and tried not to think of any more questions.

Chapter Five

It was hard to tell how much time had passed, with the sky overhead divided into black and gray with no sun or moon in sight, but it seemed to Shark Boy that they'd been traveling for nearly an hour. He was getting sore, jostled around on the cold, hard metal of the machine's shoulder, and was starting to wish that he'd stayed back in the waters of the frozen ocean.

"There," the Imagineer said, breaking the long silence. "Up ahead on the horizon. The Mind Fields."

They'd nearly reached their destination—only a few more hops to go. Shark Boy started to feel queasy, like a flight of butterflies had just taken wing in his stomach.

"The Mind Fields will allow you to enter the thoughts of the Day Dreamer," the Imagineer went on. "When you return with his dream-self, you must take him to the Dream Lair. He must dream the world aright, or all will be lost."

"But how will we know how to get there once we get back?" Lava Girl asked.

"Here," the Imagineer said, and pulled something the size and shape of a small book from his front pocket. After he put it into a slot on Shark Boy's side of the machine, a small panel on the outside of the machine slid to one side, just next to Shark Boy's elbow. "This will help guide you, upon your return."

Shark Boy reached out, and a small computer the size of a paperback book fell into his hands.

"This palmtop computer can display a map of Planet Drool at any magnification required," the Imagineer explained. "It can show you the best route to the Dream

Lair from anywhere on the planet, and will also track the rate at which the Darkness is spreading."

"Hey!" Lava Girl said. "Why does he get the computer? I'm the one who asked the question!"

"Because, my dear Lava Girl," the Imagineer said, "if I gave it to you, the first time you 'flamed up' the computer's screen would melt and its circuits would seize, and then where would you be?"

Shark Boy could see Lava Girl cross her arms across her chest and glare at him with a dour expression, but she didn't say anything.

"Now," the Imagineer said gently, "there is one person the computer will not help you locate, Shark Boy. He won't be in the places you look for him, but you'll find him in the last place you think to search."

"You mean the Day Dreamer?" Shark Boy said, confused.

"No," the Imagineer said. "Your father."

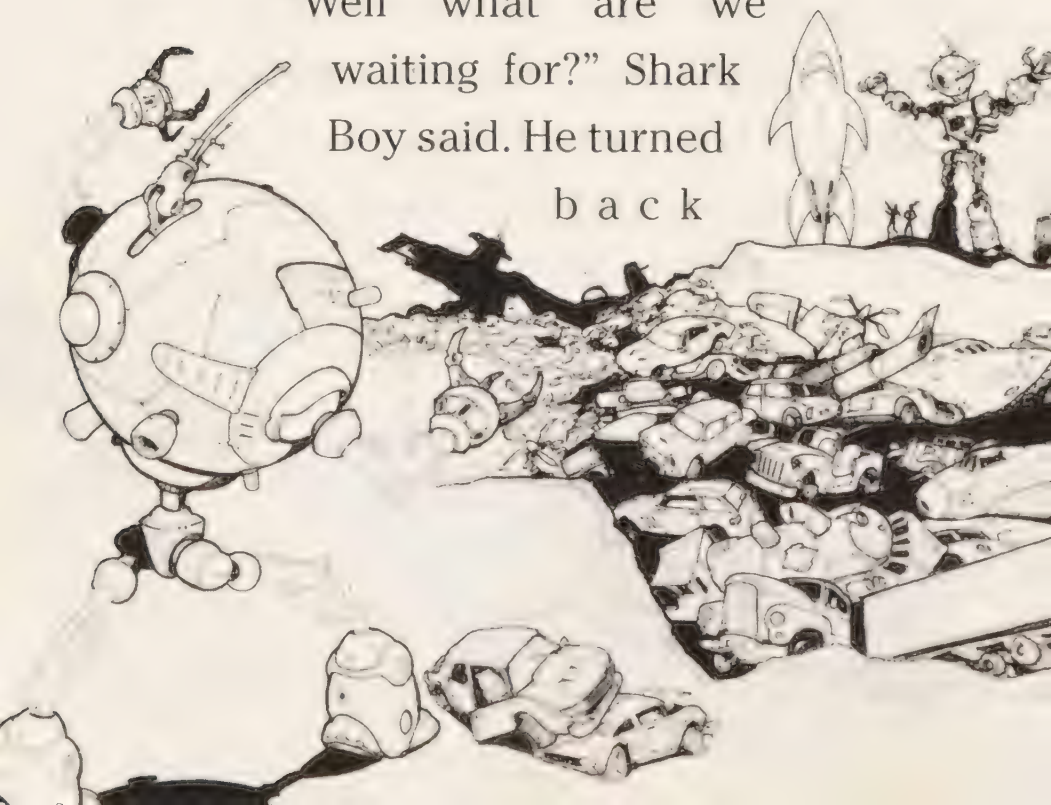
Shark Boy tried to remember his father, but when he concentrated on him, all he got was a feeling of emptiness deep inside, a sense of loss. Before Shark Boy could ask the Imagineer what he had meant, the machine came to a halt. They had reached the Mind Fields.

Shark Boy jumped to the ground as soon as the metal arm released its hold on him. He looked around, trying to rub feeling back into his bruised legs. All around were scattered ruined cars, broken airplanes, beached ships—it was like a graveyard for junked

vehicles. Beyond the wreckage was a rugged plain the color of the midnight sky, while stretching overhead was what looked like a starry night, with lights of different colors, sizes, and degrees of brightness.

"Those are not stars," the Imagineer said, pointing from within the glass-domed cockpit of his machine. "Each of those lights is instead the mind of a dreamer out in the Waking World. And one of those is the Day Dreamer."

"Well what are we waiting for?" Shark Boy said. He turned back



and waved for the Imagineer to follow. "Let's go get him."

The Imagineer shook his head, and suddenly looked very small and far away, high up behind the glass of the cockpit dome.

"I can go no farther," the old man said. "But I can assist you once more before you leave."

The Imagineer hit a quick series of buttons on the dashboard in front of him, toggled a few switches, and then pulled on a large red lever. In response, the metal arms of the machine rose up, palms forward, pointing at the wrecked vehicles in front of them. In the palm of each metal hand a small, round window irised open, revealing a many-faceted blue jewel.

"Stand back," the Imagineer said, and hit a final button.

From each of the two blue jewels a beam of light shot forward, each brighter than the noonday sun. The light shone

on the junk piled around the edges of the Mind Field, causing the broken cars, ruined boats, and mangled planes to begin to twinkle like sparklers. Then the wreckage began to glow with the same eerie blue light as the beams from the machine's hands, and after a moment the wreckage floated up in the air.

While Shark Boy and Lava Girl looked on, the wrecked metal twisted and shaped itself, faster and faster, until it was moving so quickly it was like a many-colored metal hurricane right in front of them. When it finally came to rest, the windows on the metal palms closed over the blue jewels, and everything was still again. But now, instead of a graveyard of junked vehicles, they were standing before a giant rocket.

It was shaped like a shark made of steel, its huge engines purring and ready for launch.

"I believe this belongs to you, Shark Boy," the Imagineer said. "But you must

have lost it along the way. I'm happy to return it to you. The Shark Rocket can carry you safely across the Mind Fields and into the dreaming mind of the Day Dreamer, wherever he might be."

Before Shark Boy and Lava Girl could take a step towards the rocket, though, a shrill whistle sounded inside the Imagineer's cockpit. The old man bent low over a small, green-tinted screen and gritted his teeth.

"We've got company," the Imagineer said. He pulled levers and punched buttons, and the machine turned to face back the way they had come.

Coming over a low rise, just a short distance away, appeared another man-shaped machine. But where the Imagineer's mechanical man was all brass and rivets, the product of another age, this robot was sleek and futuristic. Its arms ended in massive claws connected with joints of burning plasma. Instead of

a head there was a large screen, on which was displayed an enormous, enraged face. It stood twenty feet tall and was pounding towards them menacingly.

"Mr. Electric," the Imagineer said, scowling. "I should have suspected he'd be mixed up in this dark business."

"I'm tired of being everyone's lackey, old man," the robot called Mr. Electric said, his buzzing voice booming through the thin air. "It's time I got a bit of power of my own."

The Imagineer turned back to Shark Boy and Lava Girl

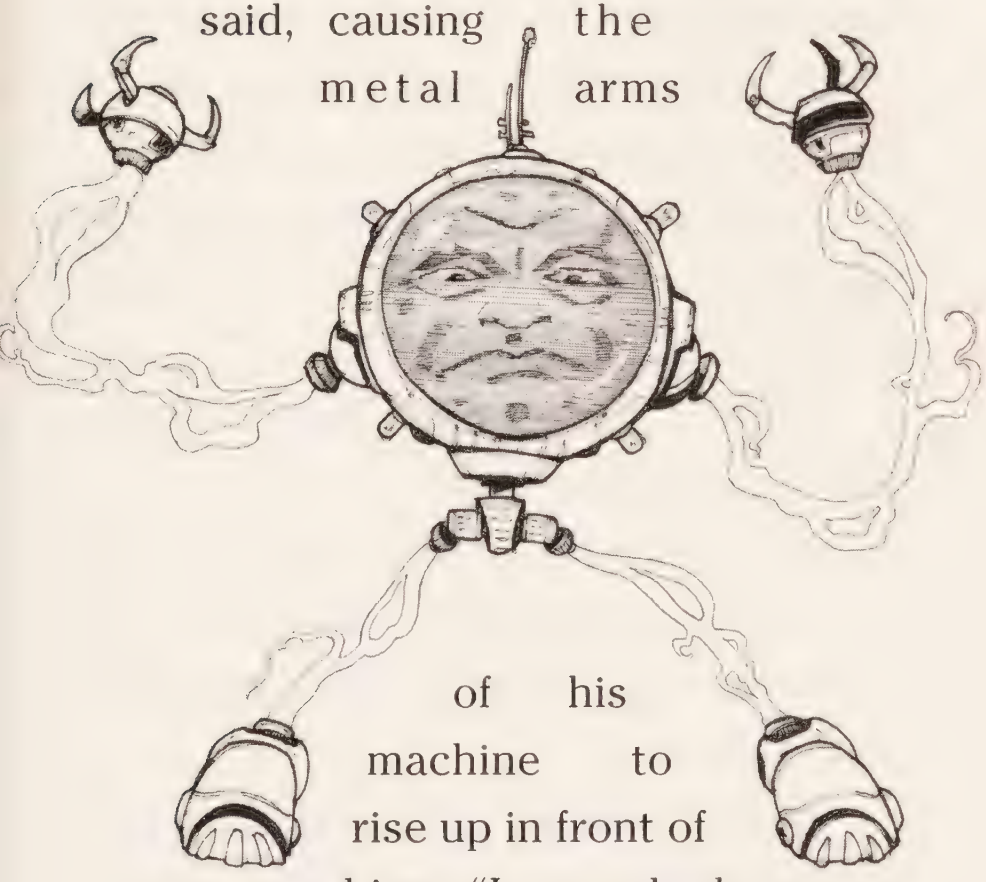
"Quick," he instructed, "onto the ship. It will carry you across the Mind Fields and take you where you need to go. I'll stay behind and keep Mr. Electric busy."

Shark Boy and Lava Girl glanced back at the rapidly approaching robot, and then rushed across the uneven ground towards the Shark Rocket.

"Don't run away, Lava Girl," boomed

the voice of Mr. Electric, coming ever closer. "Stay and play, Shark Boy. I'll have loads of fun left for you, when I'm done with the old man."

"Don't worry, children," the Imagineer said, causing the metal arms



of his machine to rise up in front of him. "I can look after myself."

Shark Boy and Lava Girl made it into the rocket, and were still strapping themselves into the acceleration chairs

when the hatch closed behind them. As soon as the hatch was sealed, the rocket blasted off without warning, pressing them back into their chairs, like a huge hand pressing down on their chests. After a few moments, the pressure seemed to let up, and they were able to sit up and look through the forward viewports.

The midnight plain slid beneath them, and they raced towards the far lights, blinking over the horizon.

"Look," Lava Girl said. "We're heading right towards that one."

Lava Girl pointed, and Shark Boy could see that she was right. They were on a direct course for the largest, brightest light in the sky.

"Hey," Shark Boy said, as the distance between them and the light quickly diminished. "Do we seem to be going kind of . . . fast?"

Lava Girl looked from the viewport to Shark Boy.

"Um . . . How do we land this thing, anyway?"

As they drew nearer, the light seemed to flare brighter in the sky, and grew so large that they could see nothing else through the viewport.

"Oh, no . . ." was all Shark Boy was able to say before it was too late. The rocket seemed about to crash right into the light, when suddenly everything was washed in blinding brightness, and the world fell away from them.

Chapter Six

When they could see again, the Shark Rocket was idling on a green field, just outside a school building. Shaken, Shark Boy and Lava Girl unbuckled from their acceleration chairs. They climbed out through the hatch, and dropped onto the well-cut grass as the engine ticked and cooled off, belts and gears slowly spinning down.

"It looks like we reached the Waking World after all," Lava Girl said.

Shark Boy pulled the palmtop computer the Imagineer had given him out of his pocket, and brought a map display up on the little screen.

"No," he said, "we're actually still in a dream. But this dream is cut off from the rest. The old man said that Planet Drool

was where all dreams were shared, but this place is being dreamed by only one person."

"Wait, so you mean that we're inside someone's head?"

Shark Boy looked at the palmtop computer and nodded.

"That's what it looks like," he said.

"But whose?" Lava Girl asked.

The two of them looked around, but there didn't seem to be anyone in sight.

"Hang on," Shark Boy said. He turned around and looked at the school building. "Do you hear that?"

Lava Girl tilted her head to one side.

"I don't hear anything," she answered.

Shark Boy paused.

"There!" he said. "There it is again. How can you not hear that?"

Lava Girl shook her head.

"I'm not hearing anything," she answered. "Maybe that's another of

your abilities, like that Shark Frenzy you went into before: some kind of enhanced hearing. I don't know. Do sharks have good hearing, too?"

Shark Boy shrugged.

"How should I know?" he said. "I can't remember anything either, remember? Anyway, there's definitely voices coming from inside that building."

"Well, then," Lava Girl said, starting towards the nearest window. "Let's go take a look, shall we?"

Shark Boy hung back for a moment, watching the way that Lava Girl's every step left a burning footprint in the cool, dry grass.

The first window they looked in showed them an empty room. There was nothing in it—no desks, no chairs, no children, no teacher. Just bare white walls, floor and ceiling. The next room was the same, and the next, and the one after that.

"Weird," Shark Boy said. "Why so many

empty rooms?"

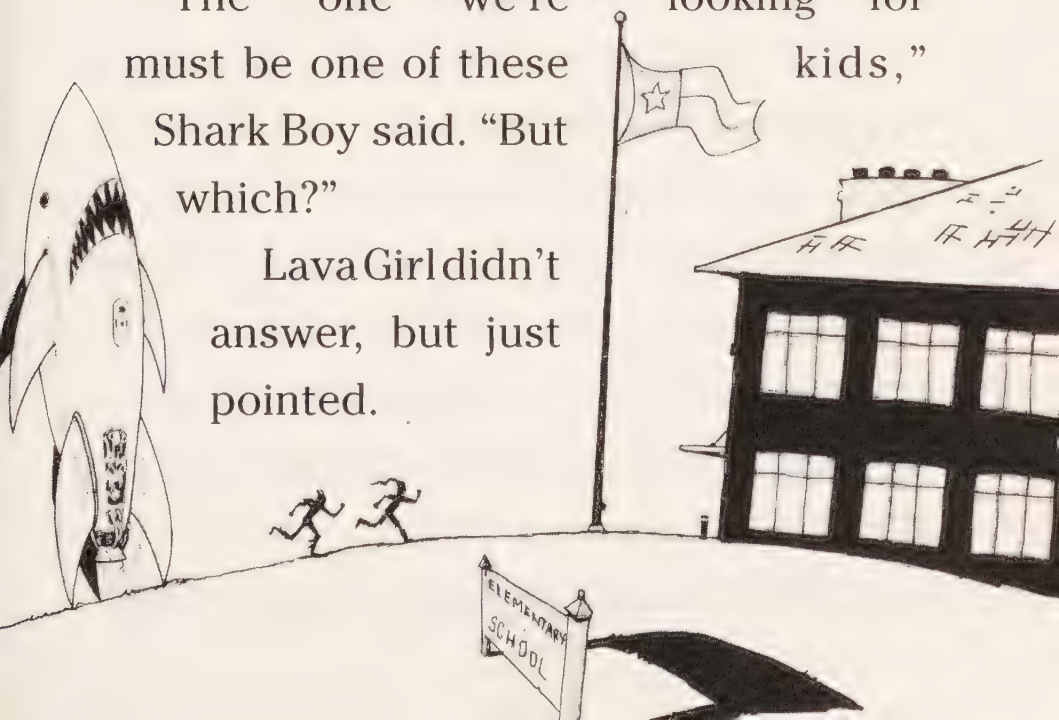
"Maybe because the dreamer can only be in one room at once," Lava Girl said. "And if there's only one dreamer here, there really only needs to be one room, right?"

Shark Boy answered with a shrug, and said, "I guess so."

The last window they checked was different. Through it, they could see a classroom full of children, all of them sitting in desks, and a teacher standing at the front of the room by a blackboard.

"The one we're looking for must be one of these kids," Shark Boy said. "But which?"

Lava Girl didn't answer, but just pointed.



Behind almost every desk in the classroom sat one child. But at a desk at the center of the room, there sat two boys. Two boys that looked identical. Shark Boy would have thought he was seeing in double vision, except that one of the two boys was sitting upright in his chair, looking at the back of the room, and the other boy was sleeping with his head on the desk. But even stranger than that was the fact that both boys were sitting in the same chair!

"That's him," Lava Girl said.

Shark Boy nodded.

"We must be seeing both his waking and dream-selves," he said.

The version of the boy who was facing the back of the room was arguing with one of his classmates. After a moment, the teacher stopped talking about whatever he was talking about, and called out to the two boys.

"Max!" the teacher said, and one of the

double-vision boys turned around to face him. "Linus!" the teacher added, and the student at the back of the room looked up.

"His name is Max," Lava Girl said, pointing at the double-vision boy again. "He is the Day Dreamer."

Shark Boy listened as the boy called Max explained to the teacher what he and the other boy had been talking about. It seemed that the other boy, Linus, had a leather-bound journal in his hands, which Max was trying to get back. Shark Boy could tell by looking that the boy called Linus was lying about stealing the book, and he was tempted to take a swing at Linus himself. But he wasn't sure what would happen if he interfered in Max's dream, particularly when he and Lava Girl were still inside it.

Behind them, in the skies over the green field, a storm was brewing. A sudden gust of winds buffeted Shark Boy

and Lava Girl, pushing them so close that Shark Boy could feel the heat of her on his cheeks..

Shark Boy looked at the skies.

"There must be a storm in the real world," he said, "and we're seeing echoes of it in Max's dream."

Another gust of wind hit, even stronger than the first, and the windows of the school building blew out. The children inside the classroom were startled, screaming with surprise.

"Come on," Lava Girl said, putting her hand on the window railing. "We're wasting time. Let's get him and go."

Lava Girl leapt through the space where the window had been, and Shark Boy followed after. By the time he was inside the room, Lava Girl was already standing by Max's desk. The dream-self of the boy was on the floor, looking up at Lava Girl with confusion and fear in his eyes. His waking-self was still asleep on

the desk, snoring gently, but the dream-self didn't appear to be able to see him.

"Come with us to Planet Drool," Lava Girl said to the Max on the floor. "We'll explain on the way."

Max opened and closed his mouth a few times before he was able to answer.

"We're . . . we're going to Planet Drool?" he said. "It . . . it's real?"

Lava Girl nodded.

"You should know, Max. You created it."

Shark Boy came up and stood beside her, looking down at Max.

"But how do we get there?" Max asked.

Shark Boy reached down a hand, and helped Max to his feet. Then he walked over to the window and pointed out across the open field. Max came to stand beside him, looked out, and saw the Shark Rocket. Max's mouth dropped open, his eyes opened wide.

"Now can we go?" Shark Boy said. He leapt out the window, and hurried across the grass. Looking up at the sky overhead, he could see that the worst of the storm was almost upon them.

Chapter Seven

The journey back across the Mind Fields was quick, and there was little time to explain to Max what was going on. They'd had just enough time to strap into the acceleration chairs before the hatch closed and the engines fired again, blasting them out of Max's personal dream and back out into the Mind Fields. The lights of other dreaming minds shot by the viewports like planets and stars, and Lava Girl kept Max distracted from his mounting fear by naming them off one at a time, a planet's name for each, as though the rocket were actually traveling through space.

Once they were almost across the midnight plain, though, Shark Boy started to worry. They'd not really landed the

rocket before, just climbed out while it idled in Max's dream. But once they were back to Planet Drool itself, they would actually have to land.

Shark Boy looked over the complicated dashboard before him. He must have known how to fly the rocket at one point. The Imagineer had said that it once belonged to him, or an earlier version of it had, or something like that. But Shark Boy couldn't remember anything about how to operate the vessel. There was a steering column, and some knobs and switches, but nothing was labeled. He had no idea how to steer the rocket, much less land it safely. He tried to work the steering mechanism, but didn't have any luck.

A quick glance out the viewport, though, suggested he wasn't going to have to worry about it much longer.

"Um, guys?" he said, pointing out the viewport at the large mountain looming

before them. "You might want to hang onto something. And hope this thing has airbags."

Before the other two had a chance to respond, it was all over. The rocket plowed into the ground, and the three passengers were thrown forward, slamming hard against their seatbelts.

When his head stopped ringing, Shark Boy looked out the forward viewports, and all he could see was dirt. Lava Girl and Max were still in their seats, moaning, bruised, but essentially unharmed.

Shark Boy was the first one out of his seat. He got the hatch open and helped Max and Lava Girl get safely out. When he stood beside the two of them, looking at the wrecked remains of his rocket, he couldn't help but feel a little sad. He'd only just found out he even had a Shark Rocket, and now it was already ruined? How was that fair?

"So where are we?" Lava Girl said,

bringing Shark Boy's attention back to the matter at hand. He'd have time to feel bad about losing his rocket later on. Hopefully he'd have time, anyway.

"Well," Shark Boy said, pulling out the palmtop computer and checking the map display. "It looks like that"—he pointed at the mountain that towered over them—"is Mount Never Rest. From here, the quickest route to the Dream Lair is via the Passage of Time, which we can get on if we go inside the mountain."

Lava Girl clapped her hands together, sending up little puffs of smoke.

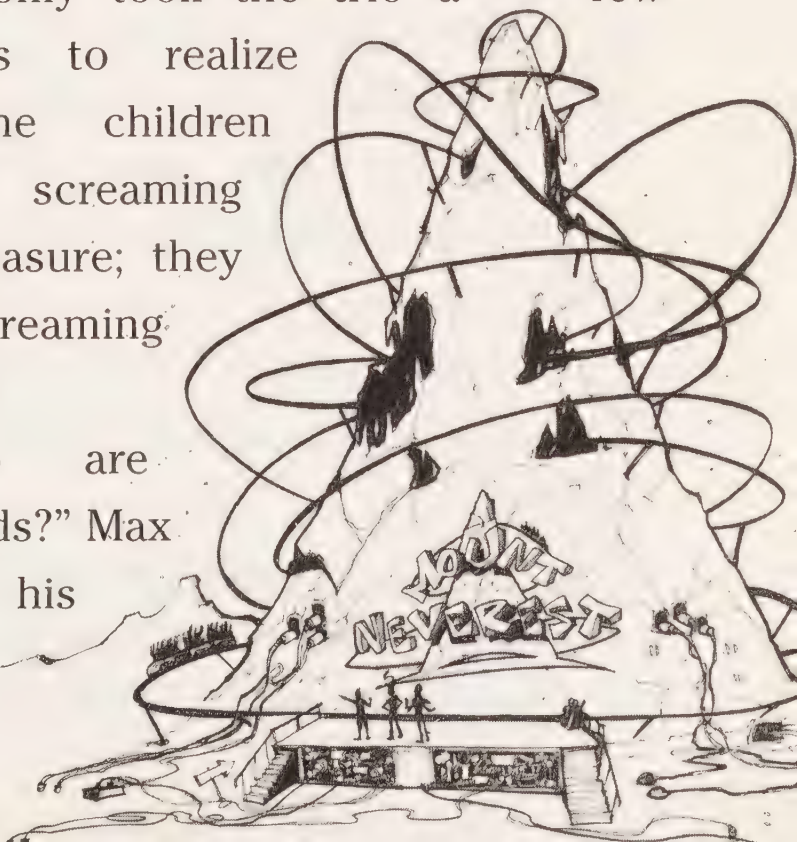
"There's no time like the present," she said with a smile, and started walking towards the mountain. Max looked from her to Shark Boy, shrugged, and then followed after.

Shark Boy spared a second to glance back at his ruined rocket, and then followed along behind.

A short while later, Shark Boy, Lava

Girl, and Max reached the base of Mount Never Rest. There was an immense roller coaster that twisted and turned all around the mountain, passing in and out of caves in the solid rock itself. The trio stood in the shadow of the coaster, power cords crisscrossing the ground at their feet. As each coaster car swooped by, they could hear the screams of the passengers, all of them children. There were dozens of cars, hundreds of passengers all together, and it only took the trio a few moments to realize that the children weren't screaming with pleasure; they were screaming in terror.

"Who are those kids?" Max asked, his voice grave.



"They must be dreams, like Shark Boy and me," Lava Girl said.

"But are they the dreaming-selves of people back in the Waking World," Shark Boy asked, "or dreams born here on Planet Drool?"

Lava Girl shrugged.

"Come on," Shark Boy said, "we've got to keep moving."

Lava Girl reluctantly started after Shark Boy as he walked away, but Max stayed where he was, his eyes following the coaster cars as they twisted and turned on the serpentine tracks.

"Hey, guys!" Max called after them. "Where are you going? We have to rescue those kids!"

Shark Boy stopped in his tracks. He whirled around, and shook his head fiercely.

"No way," Shark Boy said. "We don't have time for that. I feel bad for them, sure, but if we don't make it to the Dream Lair

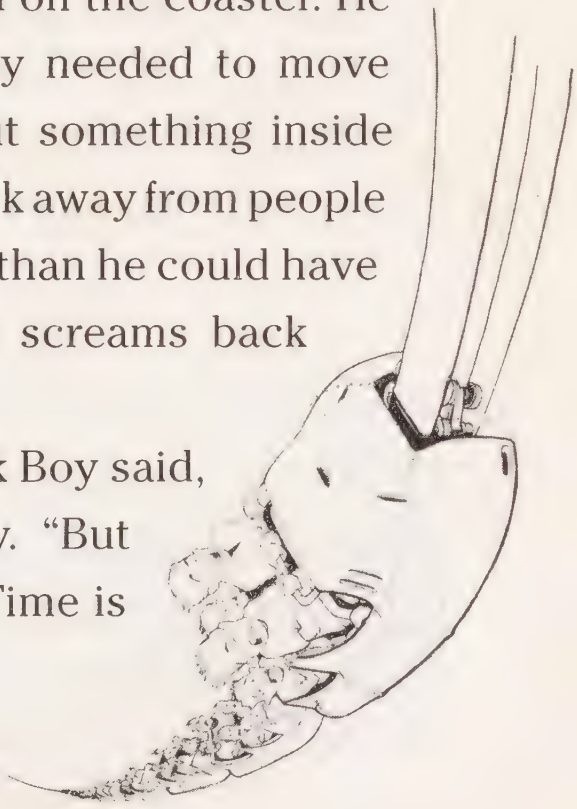
in time, all of Planet Drool will be erased by the Darkness, and then no one will survive. Besides, what if we're captured, too? Then there's no hope Planet Drool can be saved."

Lava Girl drifted back to where Max stood.

"But listen to their screams, Shark Boy!" she said. "We can't just walk away."

Shark Boy bit his lip, frustrated. He knew they were right, and that they had to help the children on the coaster. He also knew that they needed to move on, and quickly. But something inside wouldn't let him walk away from people in trouble, no more than he could have ignored Lava Girl's screams back on the beach.

"All right," Shark Boy said, nodding reluctantly. "But we need to hurry. Time is running out!"



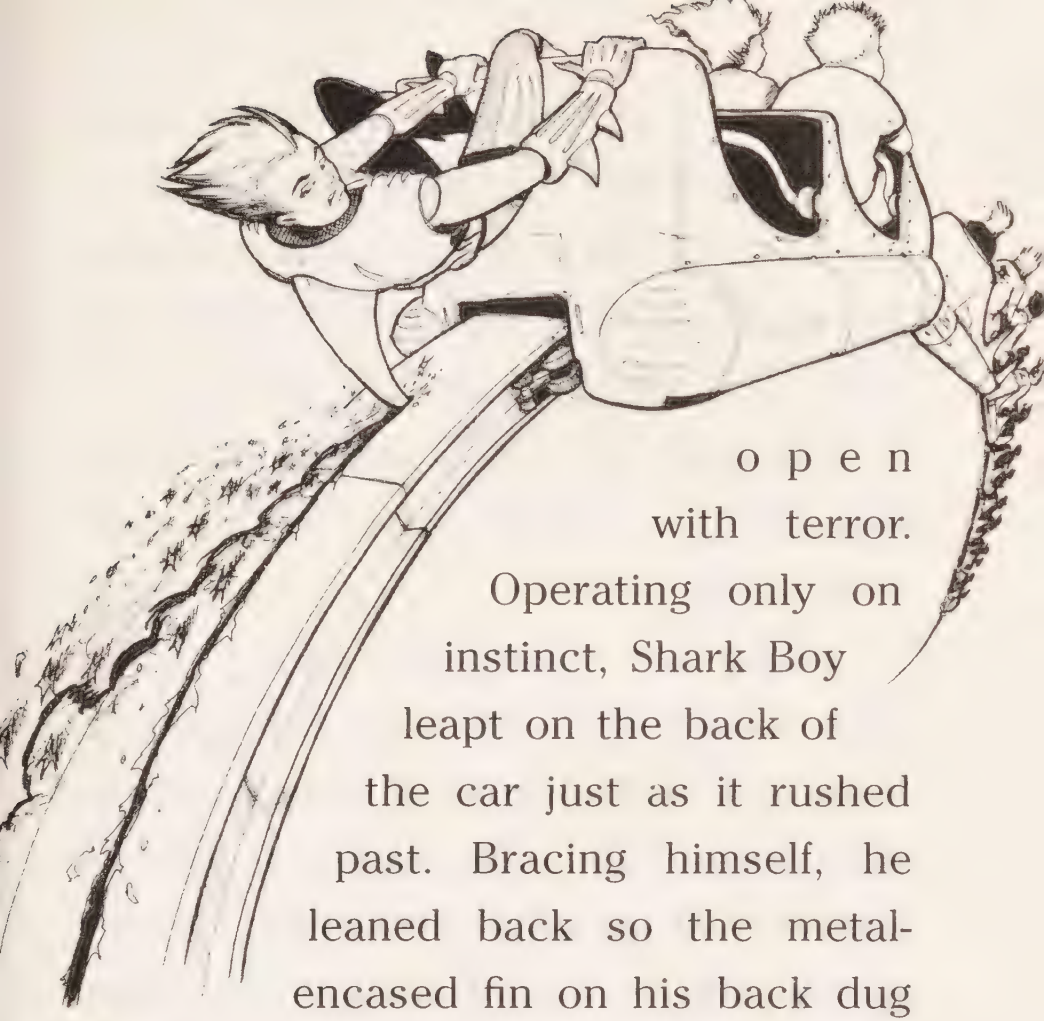
Chapter Eight

Lava Girl waved her hands, and a plume of lava erupted from the ground at her feet. The plume pushed skywards, carrying Lava Girl with it, up towards the roller coaster track overhead. The air around her shimmered with her heat, like a desert highway at noon.

Shark Boy took a running jump, leaping up to grab onto one of the steel girders supporting the track. Like an acrobat, he swung from one girder to next, hand over hand, until he reached the track.

Max followed after, climbing up the girders as quickly as he could.

A coaster car was rushing by just as Shark Boy reached the track. The children trapped in the cars were screaming, hands waving wildly in their air, their eyes wide



open with terror. Operating only on instinct, Shark Boy leapt on the back of the car just as it rushed past. Bracing himself, he leaned back so the metal-encased fin on his back dug into the track. He had to grit his teeth, but gradually the car began to slow.

Lava Girl landed on the front of the car, and straddled the car like a rider on horseback. She shot lava from her hands on either side to melt the wheels of the car to the track. Between Shark Boy's braking and Lava Girl's lava melting the

wheels, the car came to a complete stop.

"ATTENTION!" boomed a loud electronic voice from speakers mounted all around them. "WHOEVER IS INTERFERING WITH THE OPERATION OF THE MOUNT NEVER REST COASTER SHOULD CEASE AND DESIST IMMEDIATELY, OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES!"

Shark Boy recognized the voice. It belonged to the strange robotic creature that had attacked them at the edge of the Mind Fields—Mr. Electric. He wondered what had happened to the Imagineer, and hoped the old man was okay. Shark Boy felt a flush of rage suddenly wash over him.

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him.

"That's Mr. Electric!" Shark Boy said with a snarl, thinking of revenge. He turned to face the kids in the coaster car.

"Who can lead us to Mr. Electric?" Lava Girl asked from the front of the car.

All of the passengers had their hands in the air.

"Everyone?" she said.

"Um, guys?" Max said, clearing his throat. Shark Boy followed the sound of his voice, and saw Max standing upside-down on the track above him, looking down. "They're not raising their hands. You're all upside-down."

"Weird," Shark Boy said. They'd have to figure out how they were doing this later on.

Lava Girl shot a lava burst at the locking mechanism at the front of the car, and the restraining bars flung open. The passengers tumbled out to the track just below, climbing down the tracks as fast

as they could.

"That's one car's worth of kids free," Shark Boy said. He looked around them, at the dozens of other cars still swooping and diving on the tracks around the mountain. "But what about all the others?"

Lava Girl smiled.

"There," she said, pointing high up the mountain. Cables snaked up the cold rock from all directions, meeting in a big metal junction box. On the box were dozens of buttons, levers, and switches. "The master controls, unless I miss my guess."

Lava Girl rubbed her hands together, drew herself up straight, and then let loose with a blast of lava so bright it hurt Shark Boy's eyes. The lava blast hit the master controls dead-on, melting them into a pile of slag in the blink of an eye.

All around them, suddenly, the coaster cars ground to a halt. The children stopped screaming, not sure what was happening. When the doors on all the cars popped

open, the children didn't stick around to ask questions. Cheering, they climbed out of the cars and made their escape. A few moments later, only Lava Girl, Shark Boy, and Max were left in sight.

Shark Boy and Lava Girl climbed up the track to a nearby car, positioned right side up. Max climbed up the track, and lumbered over the side of the car.

"Okay," Shark Boy said. "Can we go now?"

Before Max or Lava Girl could answer, the voice of Mr. Electric again buzzed over the loudspeakers.

"ATTENTION! THOSE WHO HAVE INTERFERED WITH THE PROPER OPERATION OF THE MOUNT NEVER REST COASTER WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE MR. ELECTRIC FOR PUNISHMENT. AT ONCE!"

Without warning, the bars of the coaster car slammed shut, trapping them in place. Max was pinned to the seat in the

front of the car, and Shark Boy and Lava Girl were prisoners in the back seats.

The car took off on the coaster track, and Shark Boy was thrown back against the hard material of the seat as the car sped up. They went through a series of spirals and loops, and then plunged straight towards the heart of the mountain.

Chapter Nine

"Okay," Lava Girl whispered, leaning in as close as she dared to Shark Boy's ear without singeing him. The coaster car sped along the tracks, carrying them deeper and deeper into the mountain. "We should provide a distraction while Max gets into position, and then we turn things over to him. The Day Dreamer should be able to take care of Mr. Electric in no time flat."

Shark Boy shook his head, looking at the front of the car. Max was turning back and forth in his seat, his expression halfway between fear about what might happen to them and amazement over the wonders he was seeing.

"I don't know," Shark Boy said. "I don't know that this Day Dreamer is all

he's cracked up to be. He just looks like a scared kid to me."

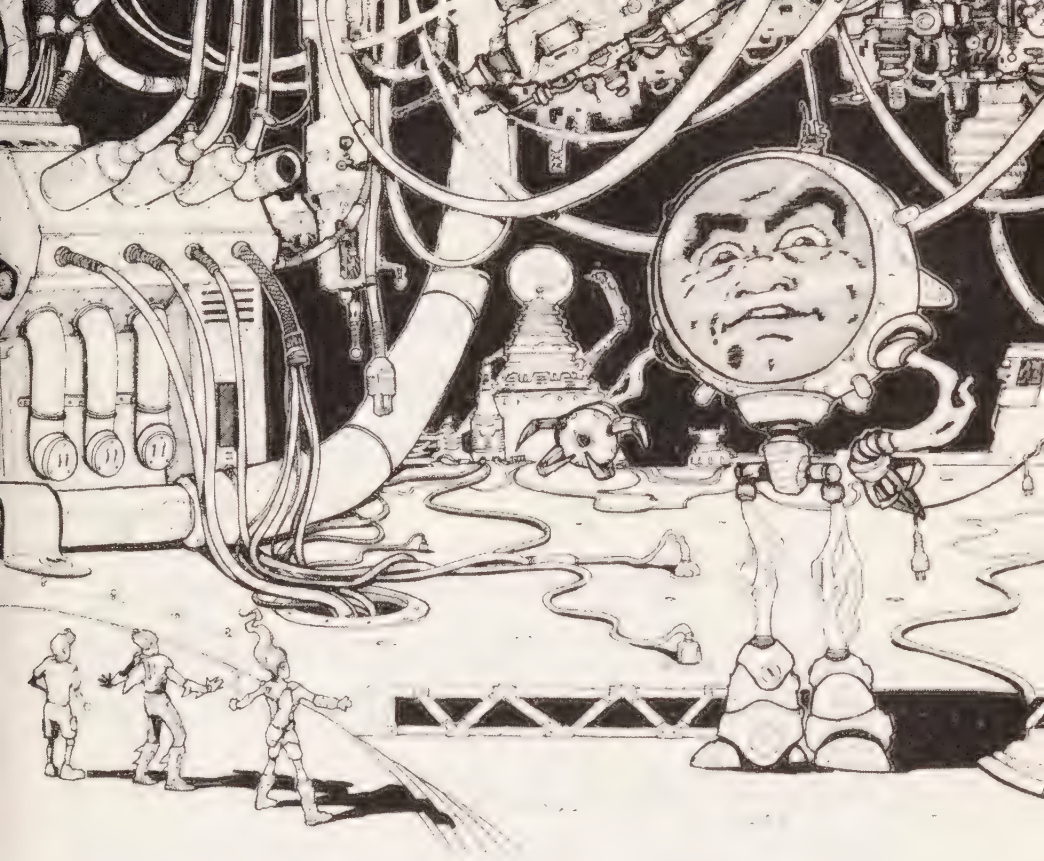
"You've got to have faith," Lava Girl said with a smile. "You'll see."

The car pulled to a stop in a large room of glass and steel. Electronics of all sorts covered the walls and floor—giant plugs as big as a person, cabling as thick as tree trunks, gadgets and equipment of every variety. Over everything was the faint scent of burnt plastic, mixed with the smell of the air outdoors after a big thunderstorm.

There, in the middle of the room, was Mr. Electric.

The car doors opened, and Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max climbed out to stand on the metal floor in front of the giant robot.

"I might have known it would be you two, Shark Boy and Lava Girl," the voice of Mr. Electric buzzed, the monitor on the robot's chest showing an amused face. "I



thought I'd seen the last of you when you tried to escape into the mind of some poor dreamer." The robot turned his attention to Max. "But I don't believe I know your companion."

The robot held out one claw, clanking at the end of the plasma joint.

"I am Mr. Electric."

"Um . . . I-I'm . . ." Max began, but Lava Girl stepped forward and interrupted before he could continue.

"Why are you destroying Planet Drool?" she demanded, her hands on her hips.

The face on the monitor smiled.

"I'm just following orders," Mr. Electric answered. "Clearing away the old to make way for the new."

"Who is giving you these orders?" Shark Boy said, eyes narrowed. He had worked his way around to the left, while Lava Girl had drifted to the right, leaving Max standing right in front of the giant robot.

"That," Mr. Electric said, "is none of your concern."

"We'll stop you," Lava Girl said.

"You and what army?" Mr. Electric motioned, and all around him the electrical cords began to move, as though they were alive. The huge plugs on their ends pulled out of giant outlets, and the cables rose up on their lengths like enormous snakes. They were some kind

of giant robots shaped like power cords. Electricity coursed up and down their forms, sparking and crackling.

Shark Boy glanced over at Lava Girl.

"Now?" Shark Boy said.

"Now!" Lava Girl answered, her hands flaming.

Shark Boy smiled. Time for some more destruction. Constructively, of course.

Shark Boy flung himself at the nearest of the plugs, his momentum carrying them both forward, crashing into more plugs.

"Melt him, Lava!" he yelled, wrestling the plug to the ground.

Lava Girl flared up, and shot a prolonged lava burst at Mr. Electric. But she had less luck against Mr. Electric than she'd had against the Imagineer's brass and steam machine. Her bursts didn't even leave scorch marks on the robot's metal skin, and seemed to just bounce off, like it was protected by some kind of

electrical force field.

Lava Girl switched targets, and hit one of the plugs with a lava burst. The plug seemed to slow down for a moment, but didn't stop advancing. She directed another burst at the plugs, hitting several at once, but when the burst struck home, the plugs seemed to double in size.

"Well," she said, "that's not working!"

Shark Boy leapt over a huddle of plugs. Once he was back on the ground, he used his claws to rip up a section of the metal floor, exposing the ground beneath.

"Lava! Over here!"

Lava Girl saw what he had planned. While she rushed over and began burning a deep hole through the exposed ground, Shark Boy raced in front of the plugs, leading them on a chase in wide circles before finally leaping over the newly burned hole. The plugs, following too close behind, fell into the large hole in a mass.

Shark Boy and Lava Girl rushed up to Mr. Electric, ready for action.

"Do you really believe you can defeat me?" the robot asked.

"I know we can't," Lava Girl shouted defiantly. "But he can!"

Lava Girl looked back at Max.

"Take it away, Max!"

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Mr. Electric all turned to look at Max. Max, for his part, just looked confused. He looked from one to the other, pointed at himself, and said in a faraway voice, "Me?"

"Whatever you're going to do, Max," Shark Boy shouted, "do it now!

Max just shrugged helplessly.

"This has all been very amusing," Mr. Electric said with a chuckle, "but I have other matters to attend to. You three will be sent to the Dream Graveyard, where all of the other useless, forgotten dreams are sent."

As Mr. Electric turned and walked away,

Max was grabbed by another robot arm. Without warning, Max, Shark Boy, and Lava Girl were unceremoniously dumped through a hole that opened beneath them in the floor.

Chapter Ten

Shark Boy landed hard, the wind knocked out of them. Everything was dark, and the ground seemed to shift beneath him. He could hear Max moving nearby, and Lava Girl glowed slightly in the dim light.

"Where are we?" Max asked, sounding frightened.

"Here," Lava Girl answered, and flames danced on her palms, bright as a flashlight.

In the flickering light, Shark Boy could see that they'd landed on a moving sidewalk of some kind, running beneath Mount Never Rest.

"Look!" Max said, pointing in the direction they were moving.

There was a light just a short distance

ahead, and strange shapes moving beyond.

"What is that?" Lava Girl asked.

"We'll know soon enough," Shark Boy answered with a shrug as they passed through the opening, out into the light.

They were in a strange tunnel that ran straight ahead into a cloud of mist. All around them hovered clocks, hourglasses, sundials, and timepieces of all kinds, flying in all directions like birds flapping around a cage.

Shark Boy pulled the palmtop computer out, and pulled up the main display.

"It's the Passage of Time," he said, dejected.

Lava Girl brightened, literally—a smile curved on her face, and the glow from her hands grew brighter—and clapped her hands together.

"Well," she said, "it's a good thing that Mr. Electric didn't learn who Max really

is, or we'd have been sent straight to the Dungeon for sure. Then there would be no escape. At least this way we're on the Passage of Time, which is where we needed to take Max anyway. Right?"

Shark Boy shook his head, sitting down and crossing his legs under him.

"Well, yes and no," he said. "We're on the Passage of Time, 'Yes.' But we needed to go that way," he pointed back in the opposite direction, "so, 'No.' We're heading away from the Dream Lair, now."

Max shook his head.

"This isn't anything like I thought my dreamworld would be," he said. "But I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Considering my waking life, I guess this is the only kind of dream I can expect."

"What's wrong with your waking life, Max?" Lava Girl asked. "You seem like a pretty happy kid to me."

"What's wrong with it?" Max asked, a disbelieving expression on his face. "How

about everything? No friends at school, my teacher always telling me to stop daydreaming. And now it looks like my parents might be splitting up. I came to dreams to escape my fears, and now its just turned into a nightmare."

"And we thought you were the answer," Shark Boy said with a sneer. "Ha!"

"Don't listen to him, Max," Lava Girl snapped, glaring at Shark Boy. "He's just upset you didn't show up and make him king of the ocean. With a giant army of fish to back him up."

"Look who's talking!" Shark Boy shot back. "You thought you'd find a great use for your powers, maybe even heal the planet. Max thought his dreamworld would be a happy place. We've all been duped."

"I guys?" Max said, raising his hand again, like he was asking a teacher for permission to go to the restroom. "I was wondering . . . Just who do you think I am,

anyway? I'm just a kid."

Shark Boy shot Lava Girl a look.

"See," he said. "What did I tell you?"

Lava Girl scowled at Shark Boy, and then turned to Max with a smile.

"Yes, Max, you're a kid, but not just a kid. You're the most important person in all the Realm of Dreams."

"But I can't even remember my dreams anymore," Max said. "Not all of them, anyway. That's why I started writing them down in my journal."

Lava Girl snapped her fingers, sending up a little puff of smoke.

"Your journal," she said. "Where is it now?"

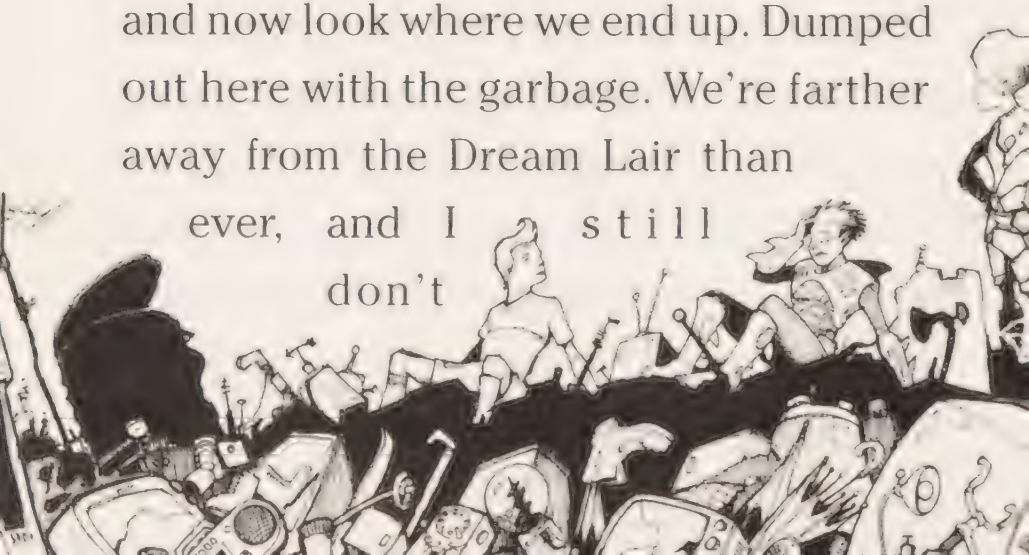
Before Max could answer, they plunged into the cloud of mist that hung over the passage. Once inside, they could see that the end of the line loomed right in front of them. A sign hung overhead: dream graveyard.

Before they had a chance to react,

before they could even speak, they shot out over the end of the moving passageway, plunging into the darkness and mist below.

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max landed in a big pile of rubbish. Different odds and ends were scattered all around—broken umbrellas, shoes with the soles worn through, televisions with cracked screens, and telephones with no buttons—all of them useless, forgotten dreams.

"This is just great," Shark Boy said sarcastically. He climbed to his feet, trying to knock the dust and grime off of his suit. "We go all the way to the edge of the Waking World to get the Day Dreamer, and now look where we end up. Dumped out here with the garbage. We're farther away from the Dream Lair than ever, and I still don't



remember anything about myself. Am I the king of the ocean, or am I just some loser in a fish suit?"

Lava Girl crossed her arms over her chest and tried to stay calm.

"I don't remember what I am either, okay?" The strain could just be heard in her voice, an undercurrent beneath the words. "But you don't hear me complaining about it."

"You guys don't remember who you are?" Max asked, stepping between them.

"No, thanks to you!" Shark Boy snarled. He slashed at a discarded couch with his claws, sending stuffing and fabric flying.

Lava Girl stepped closer to Max. She reached out a hand, intending to lay it on his shoulder, but remembered herself at the last second. She pulled her hand back, glancing at the red burn still fading on Shark Boy's cheek.

"Shark Boy is right, I'm afraid," Lava Girl

said, nodding sadly. "We're dreams, Max. And since you've forgotten your dreams, we're starting to forget ourselves."

Max looked from Lava Girl to Shark Boy and back, his eyes wide.

"Oh, no," he said. "I'm so sorry."

Shark Boy snarled again in response, baring his pointed teeth. "We need to focus on the problem at hand," he said. "Max needs to dream us out of here."

"I thought you didn't believe in Max," Lava Girl said.

"I'm not sure that I do," Shark Boy answered, but right now he's our only hope."

"I suppose you're right," Lava Girl said. "But how do we get him to dream?"

Shark Boy balled his hands into tight fists, looking like he was getting ready for a fight. Max backed away, a worried expression on his face.

"How about I put him to sleep right now, to hurry this along?" Shark Boy

said.

"No, Shark Boy!" Lava Girl said. "We don't even know if that would work!"

Shark Boy smiled, and took a step towards Max.

"Just one punch." Shark Boy drew closer, raising his fists. "He'll be out like a light."

Max backed up, startled, and bumped into something hard. A large metal surface. He scrambled, trying not to fall down and to keep out of Shark Boy's reach.

When he'd regained his balance, Max looked at the large metal object, up and down.

"I've seen this before . . ." he said. "It's on the tip of my . . ."

Max walked around the object, scratching his head. Shark Boy followed, fists raised.

"Hey," Max said. "This is a finger!"

Max stepped forward to get a closer look.

"It's a hand!" he said, surprised.

Max took a step back. There was another hand a few yards off, a twin to the one in front of him, and in the near distance, the shape of a face in metal. Shark Boy stopped in his tracks, looking at the metal fingers sticking up out of the ground around him.

"It's Tobor!" Max shouted.

"Who?" Lava Girl and Shark Boy asked in unison.

"Tobor. I dreamt about him when I was a kid."

Shark Boy gave Lava Girl a disbelieving look.

Max didn't notice, or didn't care, running around the perimeter of the robot buried in the ground.

"He was a robot I tried to build that could help me if I was ever in trouble. I called him Tobor because, well, that's 'robot' spelled backwards."

Max backed up, and Shark Boy and

Lava Girl could plainly see the outlines of the giant, man-shaped figure buried in the ground.

"A forgotten dream in the Dream Graveyard," Shark Boy said. "Somebody alert the media," he added sarcastically.

"If he was a kind of protector in your dreams," Lava Girl said, "maybe he can help us now."

Max nodded.

"He was supposed to be very smart," he said.

Shark Boy looked over at Max. From his vantage point, it looked like Max was standing in front of a bright light. He was outlined in a sort of glow, almost like an aura.

Max walked over to the giant face, where only the eyes and mouth were exposed, the rest buried underground. He snapped his fingers, and said with authority, "Tobor. Awake!

The giant robot's eyes opened slowly,

heavily. They moved from one side to the other.

The mouth began to move, slowly, making a sound like a huge door opening and closing. In a voice like a hundred buzzing bees, the robot said, "Yes?"

"He works!!" Max shouted. "We can ask him anything now!"

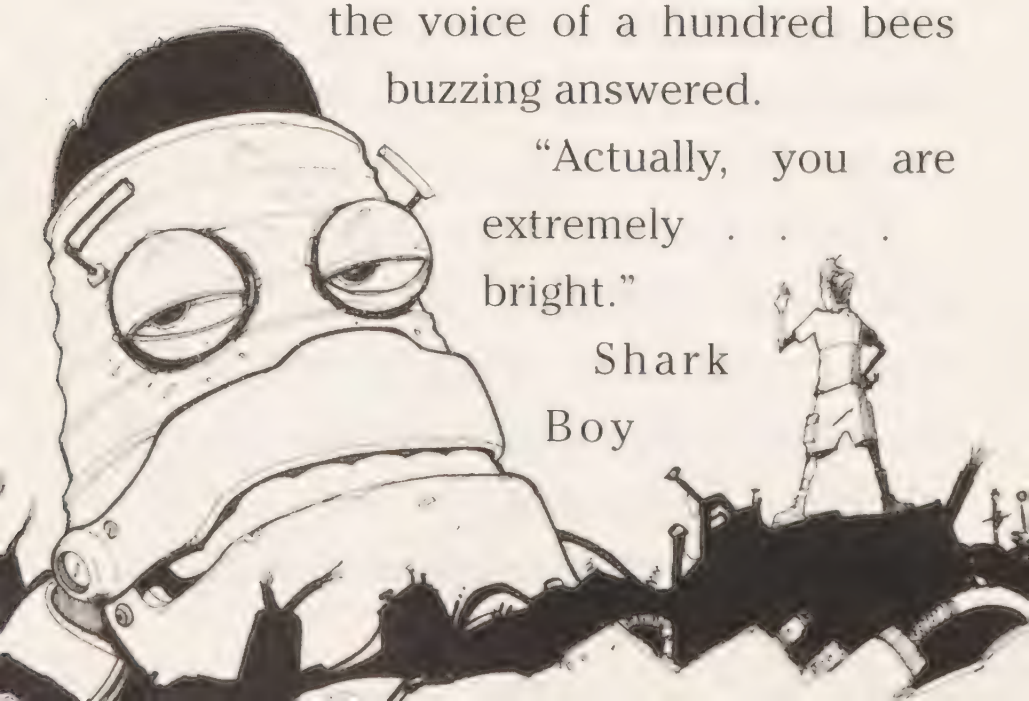
Lava Girl stepped forward eagerly.

"Let me! Let me!" Lava Girl leaned over the giant robot eyes. "Tell me something about me! I'm clueless."

There came a rumbling sound from somewhere beneath their feet, and then the voice of a hundred bees buzzing answered.

"Actually, you are extremely . . . bright."

Shark Boy



pushed Lava Girl aside, and addressed the robot. "Am I king of the ocean or what?"

Again more rumbling, followed by the buzzing voice.

"No. Sorry."

Shark Boy slumped, disappointed.

Max stepped forward, standing between the enormous eyes.

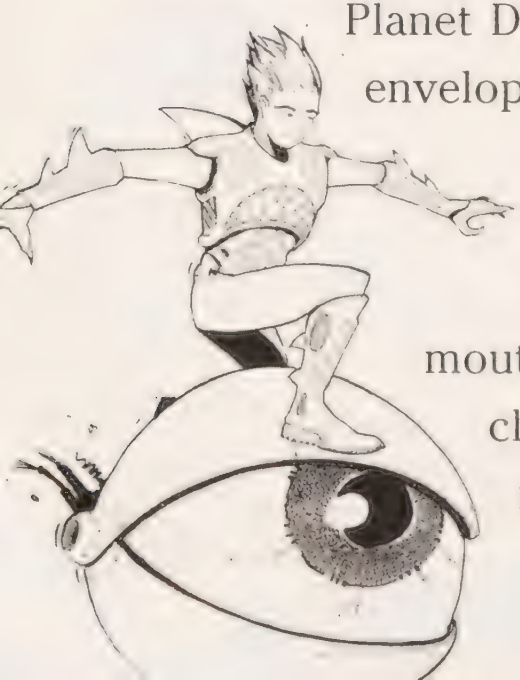
"We need to get to a place called the Dream Lair," Max said. "Can you help us?"

"I would, but it appears I cannot move."

"Well," Shark Boy said with a sly smile, "you can move your eyes and mouth, can't you?"

Chapter Eleven

The wind rushed through Shark Boy's hair, whistling in his ears. He had to hang on tightly for fear of falling off. His claws dug into the smooth surface of the giant, robotic eyeball, holding him securely in place. His shadow chased them, on the ice far beneath them, as they soared across a sky now more black than gray. The Darkness was spreading, and there was little time left before Planet Drool was completely enveloped.



Max was nearby, flying through the air on a giant metal mouth, while Lava Girl clung to the other robot eyeball, a short

distance behind.

Beneath them the frozen ocean stretched out in every direction, unbroken to every horizon.

Over the whistling wind, he could hear Max talking to the robot, Tobor.

"Why didn't you work back on Earth?" Max asked.

"SOME DREAMS ARE SO POWERFUL THEY BECOME REAL," the buzzing bee voice said. "LIKE SHARK BOY, OR LIKE LAVA GIRL. I, ON THE OTHER HAND, AM STILL ONLY A DREAM."

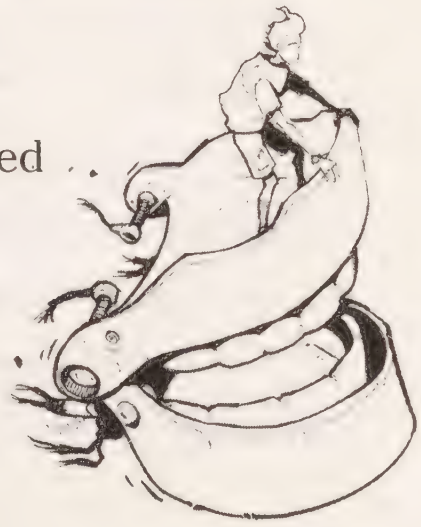
Lava Girl drifted closer, coming between Shark Boy's flying eye and Max's robotic mouth.

"How much farther?" she shouted over the wind.

"WE ARE NEARLY THERE."

"Look!" Max pointed ahead.

On the horizon, they could see what looked like a giant bed



on long, stilt-like posts, extending like a skyscraper, high into the stratosphere.

Shark Boy didn't have to consult the palmtop computer. He'd seen the image often enough since the Imagineer gave them the computer to know what they were looking at.

"The Dream Lair."

Slowly, the mouth and pair of eyes upon which the trio rode began to drift slowly towards the frozen ocean below.

"I CAN TAKE YOU NO FARTHER. MY STRENGTH WANES, SO FAR FROM THE REST OF MY BODY. YOU WILL HAVE TO GO THE REST OF THE WAY ON YOUR OWN."

"That's okay, Tobor," Lava Girl said, giving a glowing thumbs-up. She jumped nimbly down to the ice, landing gracefully. "We can take it from here."

When the eyeball dropped low enough, Shark Boy hopped down to the ice. He slid, just barely escaping falling on his backside. Finding his footing, he looked

up and gave a little salute to the eyeball hovering overhead.

"Thanks for the ride," Shark Boy said.

Max leapt down, landing with a thud between the other two. Getting up and rubbing his bruised backside, he looked up.

"I'm sorry I forgot about you, Tobor," he said.

The two eyes hovered one next to the other, and the mouth moved into position below them. The mouth then curved up at the ends, becoming a disembodied smile overhead.

"YOU HAVE NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE, MAX. YOU HAVE SAVED ME. THOUGH MY BODY IS STILL IMPRISONED IN THE DREAM GRAVEYARD, NOW MY MIND IS FREE."

With that, Tobor flew away, back across the frozen ocean. Shark Boy guessed he was going back to join the rest of his body, buried beneath the ground.

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max gathered

together on the icy shore of the frozen ocean, looking up at the Dream Lair. It stood only a short distance away, not more than a mile.

"Come on," Shark Boy said, walking away from the ocean. "Let's go! The sooner we get Max inside, the sooner we can get everything back to normal."

Lava Girl couldn't help but look down at the ice slowly melting under her feet, water pooling and then steaming away in the cold air, just from the heat of her. Glancing back at her, Shark Boy could tell she was remembering the other times she'd burned things without meaning to do so. She was wondering about her true nature, and whether she was destructive or not.

"Whatever 'normal' means," Lava Girl said, her eyes lowered. She started after Shark Boy, and then paused and looked back over her shoulder at Max. "Come on, Max."

Before Max could answer, he was cut off by a strange laughing buzz.

Max turned and pointed to their right. "Look out!"

Mr. Electric stood a few hundred feet away at the top of a hill, surrounded by a five enormous electric cords. But where the plug robots they'd seen before had moved like snakes, these robots were in many different configurations—a bird, a dog, a crocodile, a gorilla, and a dinosaur. That shifted angrily, their plug heads snapping back and forth, eager to attack.

"You escaped from the Dream Graveyard," Mr. Electric said. "I'm impressed. I suppose I should have sent you to the Dungeon right away. But now it's out of my hands. The boss wants to see you."

"Well," Lava Girl said bravely, "we want to see the boss ourselves!"

"Yeah!" Shark boy added. "But we won't let ourselves be captured so easily

this time."

"We'll see," Mr. Electric said. "Plugs! Attack!"

The menagerie of plugs swarmed towards them.

Lava Girl waved Max away, glancing over her shoulder.

"Stay back, Max. We'll handle this."

Lava Girl leapt to one side, Shark Boy to the other.

Lava Girl shot a prolonged burst of lava at the nearest plugs, the one shaped like a dog and the one shaped like a bird. The dog-plug was the fastest of the five, loping forward on its wire limbs. The lava burst hit it square between the slots on its plug face, and it reared back in pain, shaking its plug-head as though it were trying to shake loose the heat. A second blast caught the bird-plug in the middle of its metal body, and it started racing around in circles, flapping its big plug-wings, like it could outrace the heat of the

blast.

"WireHound!" Mr. Electric shouted. "BirdPlug! Stop messing around and attack them!"

Shark Boy, meanwhile, hurled himself the gorilla-plug, swiping with his claws at the two bit plugs it used for hands, and wrapping himself around the robot's waist. His momentum carried them forward, and the gorilla-plug fell over on its back, kicking its wire legs uselessly in the air. Shark Boy grabbed one leg in each hand, and went to work.

"CrocPlug! DinoPlug!" Mr. Electric called out, and the plugs shaped like a crocodile and a dinosaur turned their plug heads his direction. "Help PlugRilla."

The crocodile and dinosaur robots turned their attention to Shark Boy, and lumbered towards him at speed.

Shark Boy jumped off the gorilla-plug, having successfully tied its wire legs in a knot. The robot thrashed helpless on the

ground, top heavy and unable to stand.

"Okay, who's next?" Shark Boy said with a smile as the crocodile and dinosaur rushed towards him.

"The dinosaur is mine!" Lava Girl yelled, and hit the icy ground beneath the dinosaur plug with a scorching hot blast of lava. The ice melted in an instant, the ground below turning to steamy-mud, and in the blink of an eye the dinosaur was dragged down into the mire, its legs trapped in the slush and mud.

Behind her, Shark Boy could see the dog and bird plugs, trapped in little quicksand-like bogs of their own.

"Save the last one for me, Lava!" Shark Boy said, as the crocodile barreled into him, its plug head snapping viciously from side to side.

Shark Boy met the crocodile robot head on. He gritted his teeth, and slammed his shoulder into the crocodile's wire body, grabbing it around the middle like

a wrestler. Then, using all the strength in his legs and back, he forced the crocodile over onto its back. The crocodile thrashed and squirmed, its wire legs kicking Shark Boy in the chest and knocking the wind out of him, but Shark Boy managed to wrap its tail around its neck, tying it into a pretzel.

Shark Boy stood back, and Lava Girl came to stand beside him. They turned to Mr. Electric, panting and exhausted, but victorious. Broken and battered cords and plugs lay scattered all around, tied in knots or sinking into their own little bogs.

"Nicely done," Mr. Electric said.

Shark Boy and Lava Girl looked up. Mr. Electric was now standing just a short distance away.

"Had a good warm-up, have we?" the robot buzzed. "Ready for the main event?"

"What?" Shark Boy said.

From the hill behind Mr. Electric dozens more plugs poured, perhaps even hundreds, in all different shapes and sizes.

Mr. Electric held his arms high overhead, and yelled, "Attack!!"

Max hung back, wringing his hands, his brows knitted.

"This is all wrong. Someone *else's* dreams are in here."

Mr. Electric's arms crackled with plasma, then shot off his shoulders like rockets. They headed straight for the trio.

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max didn't even have time to duck. They felt a sudden shock, and then fell into blackness.

Chapter Twelve

Shark Boy opened his eyes. Once again he had no idea where he was. At least this time, though, he remembered *who* he was.

It took a moment to get his bearings. Eventually, he realized that he was suspended high in the air, above a giant glass tank. His feet dipped into the water, and around his toes something slithered and moved in the water. He narrowed his eyes and looked closer. They looked almost like snakes, but with fins.

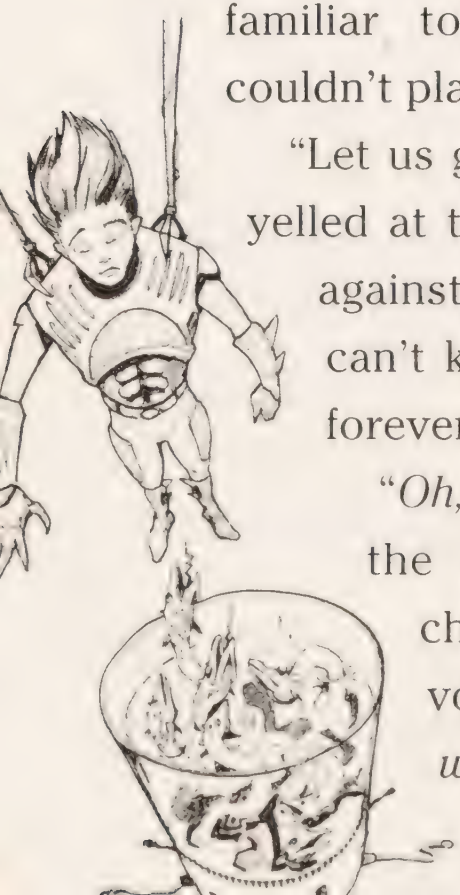
One of the creatures brushed against Shark Boy's foot, and a surge of electricity rushed through his body, making his teeth buzz in his skull.

Electric eels.

Shark Boy looked around. A short

way off, Max was suspended from the high ceiling in front of a giant face, unconscious. On the platform below, Lava Girl's feet were frozen in a block of ice. On a high platform, below the giant face, was a huge chair with its back turned to them. Mr. Electric stood to one side of the chair, immobile. The face on the robot's monitor was impassive, displaying no emotion at all.

The giant face in front of Max looked familiar to Shark Boy, but he couldn't place it.



"Let us go, Electric!" Shark Boy yelled at the robot. He struggled against his bonds. "You can't keep us locked up here forever."

"*Oh, I think that we can*," the giant face above the chair said in a booming voice. "*And I wouldn't worry about Mr. Electric*

if I were you. He takes his orders from me. I'm the one you should be worried about."

Max opened his eyes. He looked around, groggy. "Where am I?" he said.

"*Ah, the sleeper awakens*," the giant face said. "*Welcome to the Dream Lair.*"

Max swung back and forth, turning around as far as he could to see where Shark Boy and Lava Girl were. Then he turned back to the giant face, and said, "Who are you?"

"*I am the Creator of Planet Drool*," the voice boomed.

"No, you're not!" Lava Girl yelled. "Max is!"

The giant face smiled evilly.

"*Max may have dreamed it before . . .*"

The chair below the giant face spun around slowly, and a young

boy was revealed, sitting with a strange robotic lizard held in his lap.

The boy spoke into a microphone, and then he and the giant face above him spoke in unison, " . . . *but I'm going to dream it better. I'm Minus.*"

Max gasped.

"Linus!"

Shark Boy recognized the boy now. He'd seen him in Max's class, arguing with Max over the leather-bound journal.

The boy and the giant face spoke again in unison.

"*I am Minus*," he repeated. "*When Linus sleeps, he dreams through my eyes. When he is awake, I do as I please.*"

Shark Boy understood at once. He called out to Max, "He's the dream-self of the boy you know, Max."

"How did *you* get so powerful?" Max asked suspiciously.

Minus toggled a switch on the robotic lizard, and the giant face above him

flickered and went out. Then he pushed the microphone aside, and reached down beside the chair.

"I do a lot of reading," Minus said.

He held up a leather-bound book. Shark Boy recognized it.

"My book of dreams!" Max shouted, straining against his bonds.

The strange lizard creature lying beside Minus stuck its tongue out at Max.

"That explains what's wrong with Planet Drool," Lava Girl said with a sneer. "He doesn't even know which way is up."

Minus looked down at the book, and only then realized that he was holding the journal upside down. He turned it right side up, and nodded in mock gallantry to Lava Girl.

"Oh . . . thanks," he said.

Without warning, the eels in the tank shocked Shark Boy again.

"Ouch!" Shark Boy's teeth buzzed in his head like a swarm of angry hornets,

and his fingers and toes tingled painfully.

"Shocking, isn't it, Shark Boy?" Minus mocked. He flipped through the first few pages of Max's journal. "It reminds me of the time that electrical storm blew apart your father's laboratory. Remember that?"

Shark Boy didn't. He couldn't remember anything. He snarled, his lips curving back to expose sharp teeth. But there was nothing he could do.

Mr. Electric chuckled.

"Where is my father?" Shark Boy demanded to know, his voice forceful.

"Well," Minus answered casually, "let's see." He paged through the journal. Little wisps of dreams floated out from the open pages—passing thoughts. "Hmmm . . . I think maybe you should check the bottom of the ocean."

Shark Boy swallowed hard, like he'd just been punched in the stomach.

"Oh, and Lava Girl," Minus went on,

flipping a few more pages ahead. "Don't you wish you knew just what *you* really were?"

Down on the platform, Lava Girl seethed, trapped in place by the huge block of ice.

"And last but least . . . Max. You thought you could escape fear by running away to Dream Land! You failed to realize that fear exists in the one place you can never escape. " Minus tapped his forehead. "In your mind."

Max wriggled, trying unsuccessfully to escape.

"I will show you the true meaning of fear," Minus went on. "When Darkness falls, all your dreams will be destroyed, and I'll be the ruler of Planet Drool."

Minus pointed to the corner, where the little wisps of dreams from the journal were being sucked into a large machine. Once all the dreams were inside, the top of the machine smashed down, crushing

them. Electrical blasts shot out, flaring bright.

Minus waved the journal at them like he was in a parade.

"But first," he said, "I have some more *dreaming* to do. . . . "

Minus yawned and stretched in his chair. The strange lizard creature pulled a blanket over him. Minus lay the book over his face to block the light, and was snoring in seconds.

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max were helpless as hundreds of plugs came from all directions, encircling them completely, blocking out all light, all sound. There was a sudden sensation of movement, but in what direction, how fast or for how long, Shark Boy couldn't say.

Chapter Thirteen

After what seemed like an eternity, they were dumped into a cold, damp room. The only light came from a high, barred window. Through the window they could just see the shores of the frozen ocean. In the far distance, at the other side of the ocean, they could barely make out the spires of the Dream Lair. Halfway in between was a small volcano, on the coast far off to their right.

They were in a small room with two benches and no other furniture, one wall made of black metal bars and the other three of cold stone.

"We are in the Dungeon," Lava Girl said.

Shark Boy looked at her and snarled.

"Good job stating the obvious, Lava

Girl," he snapped. "Is that another of your superpowers?"

Lava Girl looked at him, a wounded expression on her face. She didn't answer, just leaned against the cold stone wall and looked out the window.

Shark Boy felt guilty about snapping at her. He was angry, but he hadn't meant to lash out at one of his only friends. He just didn't know how to apologize.

Long moments of silence passed. Max didn't speak, just paced the floor. Shark Boy crouched along the metal bars, brooding, and Lava Girl looked out the window at the volcano.

Finally Lava Girl spoke, as much to herself as to anyone else.

"Maybe that volcano is where I'm from," she said. "Maybe that's my home. It would make sense. It looks about like I feel: cold and almost out of fire."

Shark Boy curled his hands into fists, and then let his fingers hang loose.

"I can feel my strength fading, too," he said. "The end must be near."

"How much time do we have, anyway?" Lava Girl asked, as though she didn't really care to hear the answer.

Shark Boy grabbed hold of the metal bars and tried to shake them. They were solid steel, and didn't budge. He didn't even take out his palmtop computer before answering.

"Who cares?" he said. "We're never getting out of here."

"It's all my fault," Max said, looking at the cold floor. "I never should have let Linus steal my dreams." He paused, and then added, "You know what's funny, though? Since I got a glimpse of my journal back there, I'm starting to remember some of my dreams. Not that it does us much good in here."

Lava Girl saw several soft glowing lights outside the window.

"Hey," she said, pointing, "look at

those things. What are they?"

Max went to the window and looked outside. Shark Boy, having nothing better to do, climbed to his feet and went to stand behind him. Outside they could see what looked like floating dandelion heads, glowing with a faint light.

"They're called . . ." Max paused for a moment, trying to remember. "La las. That's what you get when your mind wanders."

Lava Girl couldn't help but smile.

"They're so . . . pretty."

The la las seemed to hear her. They drifted towards the window. They flitted in through the bars, and began to sing a strange, hypnotic song.

Lava Girl laced her fingers together, her eyes closed tightly.

"Oh, listen to them, will you?" she said.

She reached out and touched the nearest la la. It began to glow from within

like a tiny little sun.

"They like you," Max said.

"Their song," Lava Girl answered, a serene expression on her face. "It makes me feel so . . . peaceful. I don't feel destructive at all right now."

Shark Boy sneered.

"Well, I do!" he shouted. "That song is driving me crazy!"

Lava Girl frowned at Shark Boy.

"Don't worry about him," she said, turning back to the La Las. "He's a cold fish. Keep singing."

Shark Boy held his ears in agony.

"I'm serious! They're singing at a frequency . . . that my highly sensitive ears find . . . disturbing!!"

Lava Girl snapped her fingers, and her eyes opened wide with realization. She turned back to the la las.

"Sing louder!" she instructed them. "Sing higher!"

They did. Their unearthly voices

climber, high and louder, until it was almost beyond the range that Lava Girl and Max could hear. But Shark Boy could hear it. He could hardly stand it, in fact. His teeth were buzzing in his head like a dozen angry wasp nests at once, and his ears felt like they were going to burst.

"Shark Frenzy!"

"Come over here, Max," Lava Girl said, hurrying into the corner, "and stand behind me. You don't want to be too close to him when he explodes. . . . "

Shark Boy erupted in a sudden burst

of energy, teeth bared, claws out. He ate his way through the bars, ripped every shackle to shreds, broke the two benches into tiny pieces. On and on he went, just barely missing Lava Girl and Max, who crouched safely in the corner. He spun like a top, lashing out with claws and teeth, before finally landing on his feet. His chest rose and fell in heavy breaths, and his eyes were wide and wild.

"Nice job channeling your anger, Sharkie," Lava Girl said, rising up to her feet. She smiled at Shark Boy, and gave him a wink. "Let's go, Max." As Lava Girl stepped out into the corridor, she glanced back and waved at the little floating points of light, still signing their hypnotic song. "Thanks, la las!"

They kept singing. Shark Boy still had remnants of metal in his mouth. He spat the pieces on the floor. Glaring at the la las, he stormed out, following Lava Girl and Max out into the corridor.

Chapter Fourteen

Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Max made their careful way out of the Dungeon. They passed other prisoners in other cells: a horse in metal armor; a man in an antique military uniform, two small horns growing from his forehead; men and women in gray uniforms, wearing helmets with featureless white masks. And others, all of them sitting in the shadows in their cold cells, waiting for the end to come, all hope beaten out of them.

"We should try to free them," Lava Girl said. "They could help us against Minus and Mr. Electric."

Shark Boy was barely able to stand, having to lean against the cold stone walls as they walked.

"I don't have the strength to pull down

another door," he said. "I used up my last bit of energy in the Frenzy."

Finally they reached the outside and stood at the shores of the frozen ocean. The skies overhead were almost completely black, only a little band of gray out on the horizon.

Shark Boy checked the palmtop computer.

"There isn't much time left," he said. "Only ten minutes until the Darkness covers all of Planet Drool, and then it will be too late. Minus and Mr. Electric will erase the remaining dreams, and rebuild Planet Drool in their own image."

"What about Max's journal?" Lava Girl asked. "If just seeing it made him remember some of his dreams, what would happen if he got his hands on it?"

"If I got my journal back," Max said, "I know I could make everything right."

Shark Boy shook his head.

"But we're so far away. How are we

supposed to get all the way across the frozen ocean and into the Dream Lair before time runs out?"

"Leave that to me," Max said. "You guys would be amazed at some of the stuff I'm starting to remember." A faint glow emanated from him, like Shark Boy had seen before in the Dream Graveyard.

"Well, if we're going to cover that much ground," Lava Girl said, "you'd better be remembering something that can really move."

"How about a Sharkmobile?" Shark Boy said sarcastically. "With turbo chargers?"

Max thought about it, glowing brighter. He clapped his hands together.

"I like the sound of that!"

Suddenly, on the icy ground in front of them stood a large vehicle. Big enough for three passengers, it was all steels and rivets, with a distinctive shark design.

"Sharkmobile!" Shark Boy yelled. He jumped into the driver's seat and turned

on the engine.

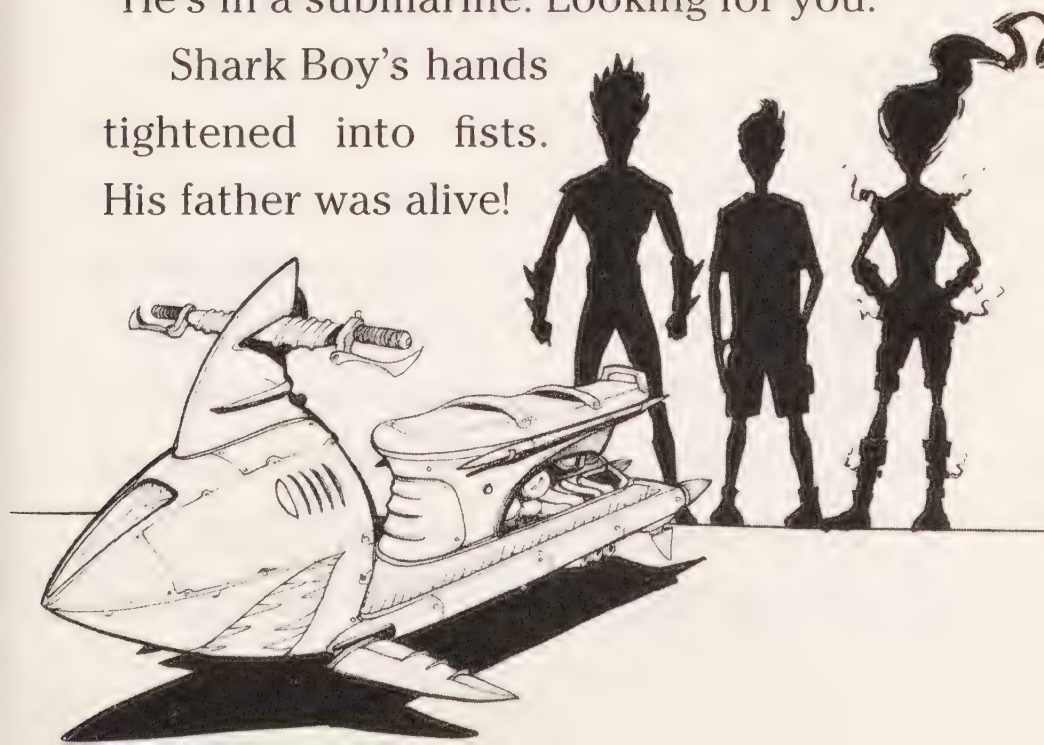
"Shark Boy . . ." Max began, and then paused. "I remember something else. Your father really is at the bottom of the ocean."

Max concentrated, glowing even brighter. Shark Boy got out of the Sharkmobile and stepped closer.

"He . . . he is?" was all Shark Boy could say. He felt a knot forming deep in his gut. His father was lost to him forever, then, drowned at the bottom of the sea.

"Yes," Max said with a slight smile. "He's in a submarine. Looking for you."

Shark Boy's hands tightened into fists. His father was alive!



"I need to find him," Shark Boy said. "I need to get back to Earth."

Lava Girl stepped forward, worried.

"What about me?" she asked. "Have you remembered what I am?

"Hmmm," Max said. "I'm . . . not sure."

Lava Girl rushed forward eagerly. Not thinking, she grabbed Max's shoulder.

"Come on!" she shouted. "Do you remember my true identity?!"

Shark Boy surged forward. "Lava Girl, no!" he shouted, but it was too late.

Max's shirt caught fire, flames erupting where Lava Girl's fingers and palm had touched. He pulled away from Lava Girl, eyes wide and startled.

"Ouch!"

Without warning, the Sharkmobile disappeared.

Shark Boy quickly sprayed water on Max's shoulder from the water bands on his wrists, putting out the fire. Only afterwards did he have time to wonder

how he suddenly remembered being able to spray water from his wrists in the first place.

"Oh, no . . ." Lava Girl said. She held her hands in front of her mouth, her expression terrified. "What have I done?"

Max grabbed his smoldering shoulder, wincing. He tried to smile, and through gritted teeth said, "It's . . . it's not . . . too bad."

Shark Boy could see he was in pain, but that he didn't want to upset Lava Girl further.

Lava Girl stepped back, horrified.

"Oh, Max," she said. "I'm so . . . I'm so sorry. . . ."

"That's . . . okay . . . Lava Girl. It was an . . . accident."

Lava Girl blinked slowly, thoughtfully, and went from being horrified to being furious. She glowed red hot and shook a fiery fist at Max.

"This is your fault!" she screamed.

"You dreamed me this way. Why did you make me out of lava? Why, Max?!"

She stormed off up the shore. Max was taken aback. He tried to follow her to apologize, but Shark Boy laid a hand on his arm, stopping him.

"Let her cool down, Max. She's just blowing off steam."

Lava Girl, steam rising from her head, sat on a big rock. The rock heated up and glowed. Shrugging off Shark Boy's hand, Max walked over to stand beside her. Shark Boy followed behind.

Silent sobs racked Lava Girl's chest, and from her eyes fell lava tears that burned into her skin.

"I don't know who I am," she said, her voice small and far away.

Max tried to answer, but didn't seem to be able to think what to say.

"I know I can be good," Lava Girl went on. "I can feel it. . . . But everything I touch, I destroy. Why?"

"I don't know," Max said.

Lava Girl pointed at Shark Boy. To Max she said, "And why'd you make us a team? We're nothing alike! If I'm near water, I fizzle out; if he's near heat, he shrivels. We're not compatible!"

She dropped her chin in her hands. The heat of her hands transferred to her head. Her hair billowed in a fiery purple flame.

Max pulled back, alarmed.

"Your hair is on fire!"

"Yeah, it does that . . ." Lava Girl answered calmly.

Shark Boy casually doused her hair with a blast from the water bands on his wrists, without saying a word.

Lava Girl, distracted, said, "Thanks, Sharkie."

"Sure thing."

"Maybe I really am evil," Lava Girl said. "Maybe I should just learn to accept it."

"You're not evil, Lava Girl," Max said

forcefully. "And when we get my journal back, I can prove it."

Shark Boy looked over, and could see the glow around Max again, brighter this time than ever before. There came a flash of light, and the Sharkmobile reappeared, good as new.

Shark Boy didn't hesitate. Now was not the time for more discussion.

Racing over, he opened the door and jumped back into the Sharkmobile.

"Well," he said, calling back to the others. "What are we waiting for?"

Chapter Fifteen

A short while later, they were already halfway across the frozen ocean, not far from the volcano sputtering on the horizon. Shark Boy was driving, with Max in the passenger seat and Lava Girl in back, trying to keep cool.

"We're almost to the Dream Lair," Max said, leaning forward and looking out the windshield.

Shark Boy kept one hand on the controls, and pulled out the palmtop computer with the other.

"We're not going to make it," he said with a shake of his head.

"How much time?" Lava Girl said.

"We're *out* of time!" Shark Boy answered. "Less than ten seconds."

Shark Boy put on the brakes, and

the Sharkmobile skidded to a stop. The Dream Lair was closer than it had been before, but was still far on the horizon. Even at this distance, though, it loomed over them.

"There must be something we can do," Max said, pounding his fists into the dashboard.

"We're too far away!" Lava Girl said.

Shark Boy kept his eyes on the palmtop computer, which was counting down the time left before the Darkness completely engulfed the planet. "Three seconds. Two seconds. One."

The sky above them went completely dark. There was no light anywhere, and they could barely see one another. Silently, the three of them climbed out of the Sharkmobile and gathered on the ice.

"No atmosphere readings," Shark Boy said, checking the computer display. "No underwater readings . . . No *anything*!"

Suddenly, the air around them

crackled, and the ice shook beneath their feet. A section of frozen ocean just in front of them melted with an electric surge. The Sharkmobile teetered on the edge of the ice for a second that seemed to Shark Boy to last an eternity, and then with a final shudder the Sharkmobile slid over the edge, plunging into the water and sinking beneath the ice-cold waves.

Shark Boy ran to the melted edge, and in the darkness could see the shimmering shapes of lifeless fish floating to the top. He shook with fury, feeling his rage building again.

From the Dream Lair, across the watery divide, they could hear again the distant laughter of Mr. Electric.

"Calm down, Shark Boy!" Lava Girl said. "Mr. Electric is baiting you."

Shark Boy gritted his razor-sharp teeth.

"I'll rip his circuits *to shreds*."

"Fight it, Shark Boy," Max said, laying a

hand on his shoulder. "Let me try to dream us past this. I'll think of something."

Shark Boy tried to control his growing anger. But the anger was winning.

"I can't . . . fight . . . my . . . instincts!"

Shark Boy shook off Max's hand, and racing forward he dived into the water. He knifed through the waves, racing to the far shore. In his element at last, he crossed the wide divide in a matter of heartbeats, swimming faster than he ever could have imagined. But his vision was fueled by rage and tinted red, and he didn't have time to be surprised.

"No, Shark Boy!" he could hear Lava Girl yell from far behind, back across the ice-cold waves.

Shark Boy reached the other edge of the divide, grabbed the ice with clawed fingers, and pulled himself halfway out of the water. Before he was on dry land, though, he saw the shadow hanging over him in the low light. He looked up, and

in the darkness could just make out the shape of Mr. Electric standing over him.

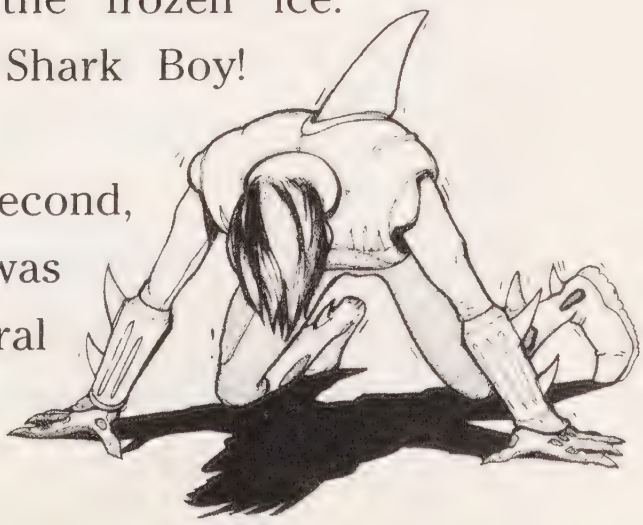
"Time's up, Shark Boy," the robot said, his plasma joints glowing an eerie purple in the darkness. In his claws, Mr. Electric carried a large tank of glass and steel, and in it writhed a dozen electric eels.

Shark Boy pushed back from the melted edge with all his strength, intending to swim away. But it was too late.

Mr. Electric smiled ruthlessly as he dumped the eels into the water all around Shark Boy. They slid into the cold waves, sparking and crackling, seeking him out.

Shark Boy could hear Lava Girl yelling from the other side of the divide, still standing on the frozen ice. "Swim away, Shark Boy! Swim away!"

In a split second, Shark Boy was struck several times by the



eels. His limbs went numb and lifeless, and he began to sink into the ice-cold water. His eyes were open, but his body was stunned, unable to move.

As he sank into the murky gloom beneath the ice, Shark Boy saw a purple light coming down towards him, piercing the darkness. It took him a moment to realize what he was seeing. It was Lava Girl, coming down to rescue him.

Just when Shark Boy thought it was too late, and that he would rest forever at the bottom of the frozen ocean, Lava Girl was swimming directly above him. She grabbed his arms, turned, and headed back towards the surface.

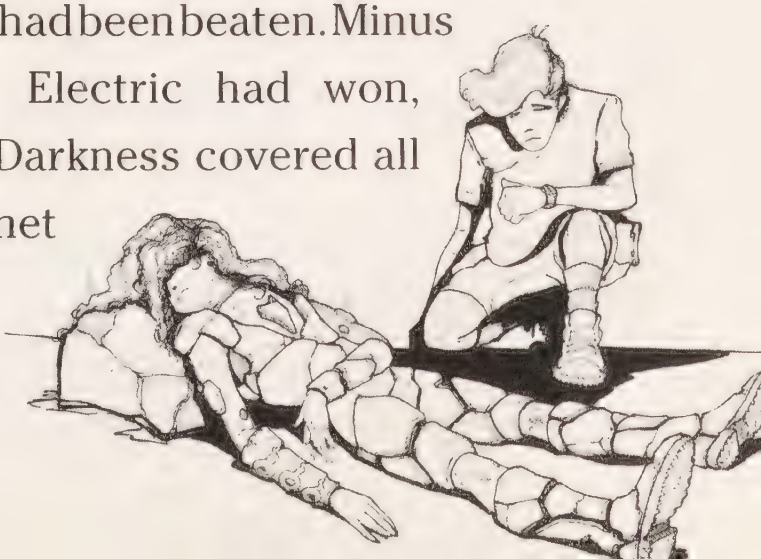
Before they could reach the surface, though, Lava Girl too was attacked by electric eels. She was shocked, again and again.

Lava Girl blasted the eels away with her last surges of lava, but not before she'd been shocked repeatedly by the

swarming eels. She began to go dim, her light going out. Her legs stopped kicking, and she hung in the cold water, not moving, Shark Boy still held tightly in her arms. Shark Boy, awake and conscious, was still frozen, unable to move. Suddenly, a pair of hands plunged into the water, dragging the two of them safely upwards.

Lava Girl was unconscious, and Shark Boy lay unable to move, even to speak. She had swum them back across the divide, and they now were once again on the ice's melted edge separated from the Dream Lair by an expanse of frigid water. Max held Lava Girl in his arms, his eyes down, dejected.

They had been beaten. Minus and Mr. Electric had won, and the Darkness covered all of Planet Drool.



Chapter Sixteen

Shark Boy could see Max, but he still couldn't move or speak. Max held the motionless form of Lava Girl, cold and dim, in his arms.

"What am I going to do now?" Max said in a quiet voice.

Shark Boy couldn't answer, but after a moment realized that Max didn't know he was awake. Max wasn't talking to him; he was talking to himself. And Max didn't expect anyone to answer.

Shark Boy was as surprised as Max, then, when someone *did* answer.

A voice like a hundred bees buzzing spoke.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD DO?"

The face of the robot Tobor lowered from out of the sky, floating eyes and

mouth, and came to rest just behind Max.

"Dream a better dream."

Tobor's giant eyes blinked slowly, thoughtfully.

"INTERESTING," Tobor said. "EXPLAIN."

"I used my dreams to try to escape my real world," Max said. "I never tried to dream my world better."

"YOU'RE BECOMING A VERY GOOD DREAMER, MAX."

"So what do you do . . . when your dreams have been destroyed?"

"YOU CREATE NEW ONES, MAX. WITH YOUR EYES OPEN."

Tobor began to lift into the sky.

"DREAM A BETTER WORLD, MAX."

Max smiled slightly, and began to glow.

"Thanks," Max said.

Shark Boy could feel a surge of energy run through his body. He sat upright. Slowly regaining his strength, he crawled

over to where Max sat, and knelt down, looking at the cold, dark form of Lava Girl.

"She knew this would happen if she tried to save you, Shark Boy. I couldn't stop her."

Max cried, without shame. A single tear fell on Lava Girl's face, and put out her last ember. She was completely dark and lightless now, cold and unmoving.

In the Darkness that surrounded them, a small flash of light flared from the volcano behind them.

Max turned, and pointed towards the faint light.

"We have to get her back to the volcano," he said.

"Will it save her?" Shark Boy asked.

"If we drop her in . . . we can do more than save her."

Shark Boy took Lava Girl in his arms and stood up.

Max jumped to his feet, reaching for

Lava Girl.

"What are you doing?

"I'll go," Shark Boy said. "I'm stronger and faster. You'd never reach it in time."

"But once you reach the volcano, the heat will make you dry up and wither. You'll burn up."

Shark Boy looked from Max to the volcano and back.

"Max, are you sure this will save her?"

Max thought for a moment. He nodded, and said, "I think it will."

"That's all I need to know." Shark Boy looked down at Lava Girl, motionless in his arms. "Hang on, Lava Girl."

Shark Boy sprinted toward the volcano, Lava Girl in his arms, racing under a black sky.

Shark Boy could hear Max speaking to them as he ran. But it was like Max's voice sounded in his head more than in his ears.

"I know who you are, Lava Girl. You are

not destruction. You are *not* fire. You are greater than that. Something beautiful, and necessary. That is why you must live."

Quicker than he could have thought possible, Shark Boy reached the base of the volcano.

Not pausing an instant, he raced up the side. With every step he took, he could feel the water being drawn out of his body. His lips chapped, his eyes were dry and stung, but still he climbed on, feeling his energy ebb with every step.

He reached the top of the volcano, and chanced a look over the edge. Red-hot magma swirled down below, the air blasting up from within hotter than an open furnace.

Shark Boy glanced back the way he'd come. He just hoped that Max was right.

"This better work," he said, and tossed Lava Girl into the volcano.

She drifted downwards, spiraling on the hot air venting up from the plasma. She fell slowly like a kite whose string has been cut. When she finally hit the red magma below, she bobbed once, then twice, and then was swallowed up. She sank beneath the lava, out of sight.

Light glared from the volcano, followed by a loud boom. Shark Boy's sensitive ears rang, and his teeth rattled.

He leaned forward, peering over the edge. The calm surface of the magma had begun to jostle violently. It looked like the volcano was about to erupt. He leapt

back, almost falling down the side of the volcano.

Suddenly, a blinding light appeared overhead, and Lava Girl flew back out of the mouth of the volcano, landing nimbly on the mouth's edge.

Lava Girl stood smiling at Shark Boy. She was majestic and radiant.

"Stand back," she said, motioning him to retreat.

Shark Boy didn't need to be told twice. He leapt back down the side of the volcano, his skin charred and smoking.

Shark Boy could hear again the voice of Max, and he knew that Lava Girl could hear it, too. Max was speaking directly to their minds.

"You are *not* destruction, Lava Girl. You are *not* evil. You. Are. *Light!*"

In response, Lava Girl conjured up a pillar of flames that slammed into the sky and reflected light over the entire planet. An intense, awesome heat washed over

Shark Boy, pouring out over the whole planet. Lava Girl sustained it, effortlessly. She fed off it as much as it fed from her.

"Wow," was all Shark Boy could think to say.

Lava Girl was like a magnificent sun, standing atop the volcano. The sky was suddenly bright and beautiful, like a summer's day.

Shark Boy stood at the base of the volcano, looking up, stunned.

Max appeared at his side, suddenly.

"Whoa!" Shark Boy said. "How'd you get here so fast?"

Max looked up at Lava Girl and smiled.

"With Lava Girl pushing back the Darkness, I can do a lot of things now."

Max turned back to Shark Boy.

"I need you to hold off Mr. Electric while I deal with Minus. I'm still not strong enough to handle both of them at once."

"Take on Mr. Electric? Me and what

army?"

Max turned around, and looked at the frozen ocean behind them. "I can unfreeze the ocean. . . ."

Max glowed brighter, and the ice melted. In the span of a few eyeblinks, the waters were moving freely, with just a few chunks of ice floating here and there like miniature icebergs.

"The rest is up to you," Max finished. "Remember, Shark Boy. You can be anyone you dream yourself to be." Then he flashed away, disappearing from view.

Shark Boy smiled. He rubbed his hands together eagerly, and dove into the waves.

Chapter Seventeen

Shark Boy sped across the ocean, making one or two stops along the way, dropping in on old friends he'd just started to remember.

In the shadow of the Dream Lair, Mr. Electric stood on a shelf of ice, looking out over the thawed ocean. He shivered with rage.

"Who is responsible?" his electronic voice buzzed.

"Well, I'm not really to blame, but I'll happily take credit for it."

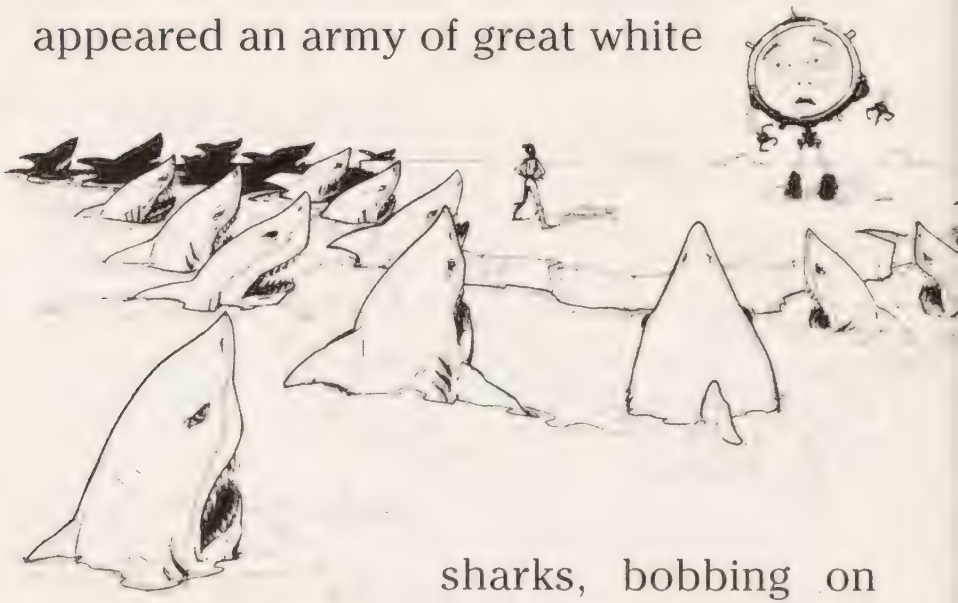
Mr. Electric turned, and saw Shark Boy standing a short distance away, his back to the ocean.

"Electric," Shark Boy said, pointing a claw at the robot. "Get ready for a power outage."

Mr. Electric laughed, the face on the chest monitor twisted in a maniacal smile.

"And who are *you* to think you can defeat me?"

"Oh," Shark Boy said, "no one special, just"—from behind Shark Boy appeared an army of great white



sharks, bobbing on the waves, wide-open mouths full of razor-sharp teeth—"the king of the ocean!"

A shark fin sliced a circle in the ice around Mr. Electric's feet. Before the robot could escape, he plunged into the frigid water, screaming.

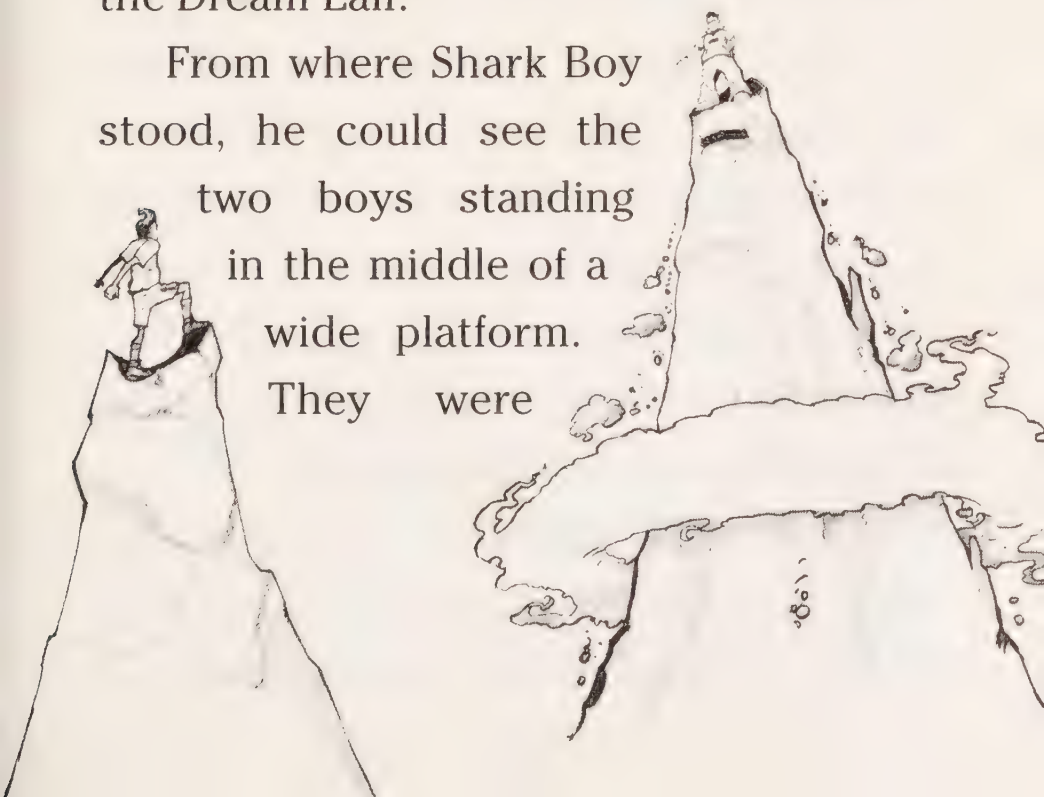
Shark Boy motioned to the sharks. As one, the great whites surged forward, jostling to see which would be the one to take the biggest bite of Mr. Electric.

"Shark Frenzy," he said with a grin.

Shark Boy turned, and walked towards the Dream Lair.

He arrived in time to see the end of what would come to be called the Battle of the Dreamers. While he watched, Max and Minus attacked one another with the products of their imaginations, there atop the Dream Lair.

From where Shark Boy stood, he could see the two boys standing in the middle of a wide platform. They were



surrounded by projections, little pockets of reality that seemed real to them, but from Shark Boy's perspective seemed insubstantial, translucent. The projections around them shifted and changed almost too fast for Shark Boy's eyes to follow.

An enormous arm grew out of the ground and lifted Max up on the palm of a giant hand.

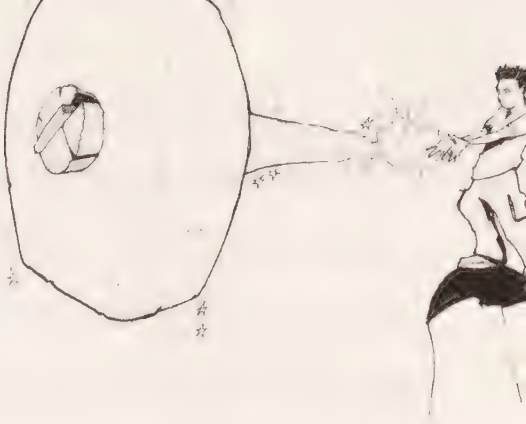
Minus conjured up another giant arm beneath himself, which lifted him higher than Max. They now appeared to be up in the clouds.

Max created a lightning bolt from the imagined clouds that struck at Minus.

Minus struck back with a giant mallet, like the hammer of a thunder god, pounding at the giant arm supporting Max.

Attack and retaliate. Dodge and feint. Again and again the two lashed out at each other, seeming to be equally matched.

Never could one get the advantage, with every move he made checked by his opponent.



A wooden bridge appeared, linking the two hands with a row of narrow wooden slats. Max and Minus each walked to the center, eyeing each other warily.

"You're just copying me," Max finally said, crossing his arms. "No ideas of your own! So I *can* defeat you"—he paused, a sly smile on his face—"by *dooming us both*!"

Max conjured a massive lightning blast. With a deafening crack, it struck the bridge, almost disintegrating it entirely, leaving only the two slats beneath their feet.

The two plunged towards the earth in free fall, the wooden boards falling with them.

To Shark Boy it looked like they were

trapped in a mirage, reacting to illusions. But he knew that to each of them it was real. Deadly real.

Max concentrated, and the two boards that had been beneath his feet reconfigured into a propeller, that buoyed him up in the air. He hovered in place for a moment, then drifted gently down to earth.

Too frightened to mimic Max, Minus was unable to conjure a propeller of his own. He plummeted towards the ground at a terrifying speed.

"Help me!" Minus screamed, as Max buzzed down next to him. "I can't . . . I'm sorry, Max. Don't let me fall!"

Max smiled.

"I wouldn't dream of it, Minus."

Max reached out, and grabbed Minus's arms. Effortlessly, he lowered Minus safely to the ground.

While Minus panted, trying to catch his breath, the glow around Max dimmed

slightly. As Shark Boy looked on, the illusion in which the two dreamers had moved began to fade. In an instant, the miniature Earth, the rubble of the mountains, the storm clouds—all of it vanished.

Max now stood in the middle of the raised platform, Minus crouched on the metal floor at his feet.

Shark Boy felt a sudden wave of heat on his cheek. He turned, and saw Lava Girl flying in on a plume of hot lava. The skies above were a bright, clear blue. She landed at Shark Boy's side, still radiant and glowing.

"The Darkness has retreated," she said. "But Planet Drool still needs to be restored."

"Max has been working on that." Shark Boy pointed at Minus, who sat at Max's feet.

Minus looked up at Max, and across the distance Shark Boy could hear Minus

say in a tiny voice, "I'm . . . sorry, Max. You *are* the Day Dreamer."

Minus reached into a deep pocket, and took out a battered leather-bound journal.

"I think this belongs to you," he said, holding it up to Max.

Max reached down, and took the journal in his hands. Suddenly, everything changed.

Chapter Eighteen

As soon as the journal was back in Max's hands, Shark Boy could feel the last shadows in his memories being burned away. He could remember everything now. He looked at Lava Girl, and from her smile he could see that she could remember, too.

"Queen of a whole city," Lava Girl said in a hushed whisper, almost too quiet for Shark Boy to hear.

Before Shark Boy could answer, Lava Girl turned to him, her smile widening.

"Come on!" she said.

Cooling down her arm and carefully placing it around Shark Boy's back, Lava Girl carried them to the platform on a plume of lava.

Max was helping Minus to his feet.

They both turned to see Lava Girl and Shark Boy land beside them.

"Max," Lava Girl said, stepping closer. "I am light."

Max nodded, and said, "I know."

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"Okay," Shark Boy interrupted, pushing forward, "so she's a light. Big deal. The real news is what *I* am!"

"Annoying?" Lava Girl said to him with a smile.

Shark Boy puffed out his chest, beaming with pride.

"King of the ccean," he said. "I dreamed it, and made it real."

Lava Girl leaned forward, and gave Shark Boy a peck on the cheek.

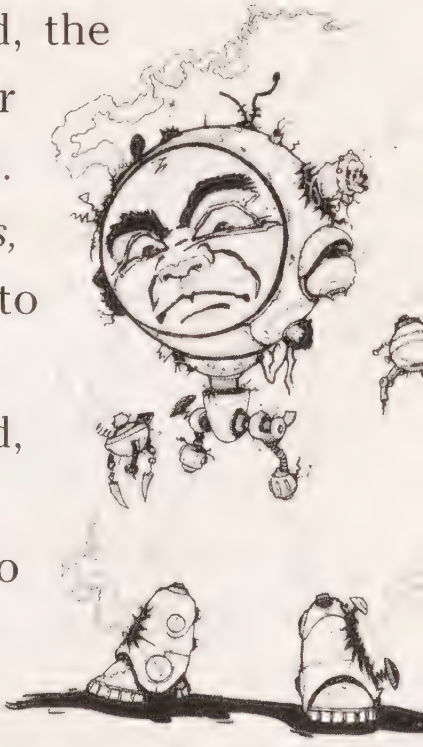
"Thanks for saving me, by the way," she whispered in his ear.

Shark Boy's face sizzled where she'd kissed it, but he couldn't help but smile.

A dark shadow fell across them without warning, and there came the sound of a low buzz. It was an angry noise, like an old radio broadcasting the growl of a vicious dog.

They looked up, and found Mr. Electric towering over them. Water poured from his joints, and his legs and arms were covered with the enormous bite marks of great white sharks, but he was in one piece, and he was angry.

"Well," the robot said, the face on the chest monitor sneering in displeasure. "Now that we're all *friends,* what am *I* supposed to do?"



Minus stepped forward, his chin raised proudly.

"Now," he said, "you go back to doing your job."

"What?" the robot's voice buzzed. "Plugging in power cords? Keeping the trains running on schedule? All of that noise, all of that commotion?"

Max stepped in front of Minus, pointing an accusing finger at the robot.

"I dreamed you to be someone who protects, not someone who controls."

"No," Mr. Electric said with an electronic snarl. "I like what I've become, and I'm not changing back."

A storm roiled in the sky. Shark Boy looked at it, and with his memories returned, he knew exactly what it is. A Reality Storm. Just like the kind that had brought him to Planet Drool when he was a child.

Without another word, Mr. Electric blasted away in an arc of electricity, right into the clouds overhead.

"Where did he go?" Max asked, eyes on the ominous clouds above them.

"He's heading to the Waking World,"

Shark Boy said, turning to face Max. "He's heading to Earth!"

"You saved Planet Drool, Max," Lava Girl said, coming up to stand beside Shark Boy. "Now you need to save the Waking World.

"He's going to try and destroy you in your sleep," Minus added, joining them.

Max looked at the three dreams, confused.

"You mean . . . I'm asleep? All this time I've been asleep?"

Lava Girl nodded.

"You're dreaming, Max."

"Open your eyes," Shark Boy said.

"Make the dream real, Max," Lava Girl said.

"But . . ."

"Three," Lava Girl said, holding up three fingers.

"Wait," Max said, hurriedly. "What happens when . . ."

Shark Boy held up two fingers. "Two."

"Will I ever see you again?" Max pleaded.

Lava Girl and Shark Boy looked at each other, and then back at Max. Smiling, they said in unison, "One!"

The glow around Max flared brighter, and then dimmed.

For a moment, Shark Boy could see two Maxes standing side by side, one with his eyes open, one with his eyes closed.

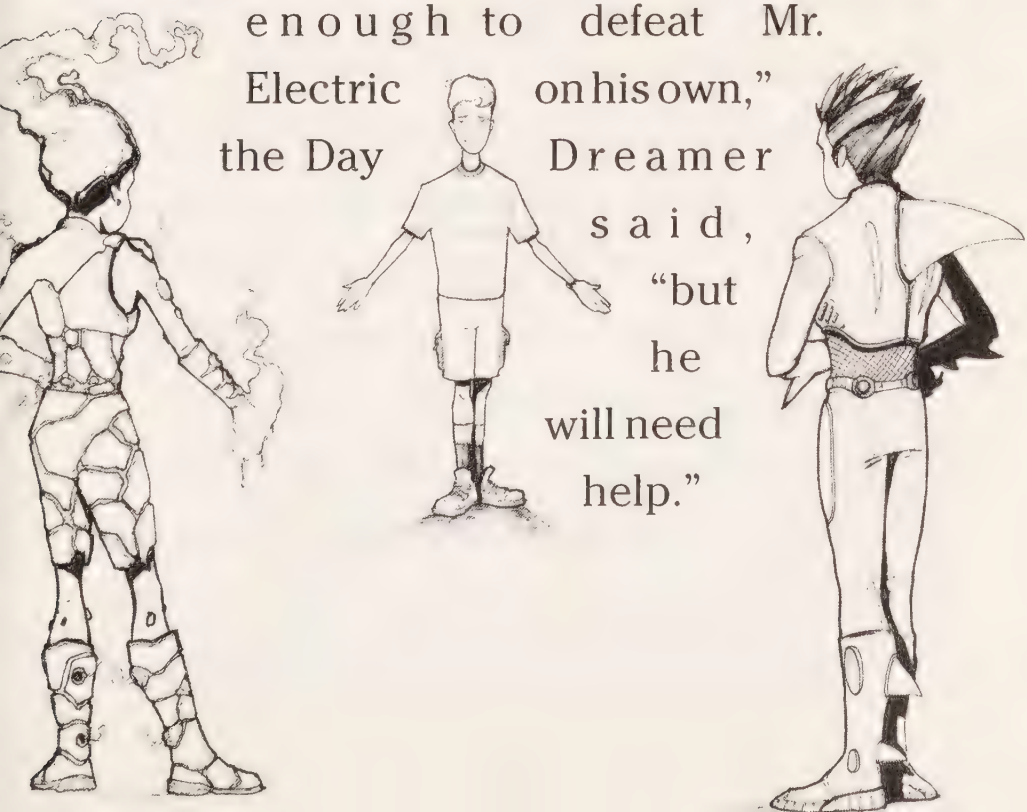
Then the one with his eyes closed disappeared in a shower of sparks, leaving only one behind.

This Max looked at them with a wise smile, and Shark Boy immediately knew who he was looking at—the unencumbered dream-self of Max. He *was* the Day Dreamer.

Chapter Nineteen

The Day Dreamer seemed to glow from within. He looked exactly like the Max they'd come to know, but he seemed somehow more powerful, wiser, and more serene. It was easy to imagine that *this* Max had dreamed everything around them into existence.

"My waking-self is nearly strong enough to defeat Mr. Electric on his own," the Day Dreamer said, "but he will need help."



"Send us!" Shark Boy said. He remembered that the Imagineer had said that the Day Dreamer would be powerful enough to open the way between the worlds of waking and dreaming. Shark Boy wondered what had happened to the Imagineer after he and Lava Girl had left to find Max. But there wasn't time to worry about that now. Maybe they'd look for the old man once they got everything back to normal.

"We'll take care of that robot!" Lava Girl simmered, her hair drifting all around her in the heat waves she gave off.

"I might be able to send you bodily, at that," the Day Dreamer answered. "In person, rather than just moving into the waking dreams of Max, as you did before." He glanced behind him. "Portal."

Suddenly a portal appeared in midair. He didn't even need to move his hands this time, Shark Boy noticed; he just looked, spoke, and his thoughts became

real.

The portal looked like a hole cut in the air, about the size and shape of a doorway. Beyond it, they could see Max's classroom, just as it had appeared in Max's dream. Shark Boy and Lava Girl rushed towards the portal, ready for trouble.

"Wait," the Day Dreamer said, holding up his hands. "The portal is now only a window, so that we can look into the Waking World without ourselves being seen. If need be, I can turn it into a doorway. For now, let us see how my waking-self fares."

In the space behind the portal, they could see the giant robot tearing his way into the classroom, and Max standing bravely before him.

"Behold," the Day Dreamer said. "It would appear that Max has already found the help he needs."

As they watched, one of Max's classmates stepped forward to stand at

his side. It was Linus!

Shark Boy glanced over at Minus, and back at the boy seen through the portal.

"My waking-self," Minus said, proudly. "Linus felt what I felt, when Max saved my life. He will always be an asset to Max now, not an obstacle."

On the screen, Mr. Electric let loose a bolt of electricity that arced around and struck Linus in the seat of his pants. Linus pulled Max's journal from his pocket, with a grimace. It was burned beyond recognition.

"The Dream Journal!" Minus shouted, stepping nearer to the portal. "It's ruined!

"Don't worry," the Day Dreamer said, laying a hand on Minus's shoulder. "Max has moved beyond that, now. Watch."

On the screen, Max could still be seen, standing defiantly in front of Mr. Electric. As they watched, though, his classmates and teacher came forward to stand beside

him, all of them together, offering Max their support.

Max glanced around at his gathered classmates, and looked up at the giant robot with a smile. Max concentrated, a slight glow flaring in his eyes.

In a shower of sparks, Mr. Electric exploded.

Max's classmates and teacher cheered, and lifted him up in the air, like an athlete who'd just won the big game.

The Day Dreamer turned away from the portal, a satisfied look on his face. The portal closed behind him, disappearing from view.

"It is done." The Day Dreamer directed his attention to Shark Boy, Lava Girl, and Minus, folding his arms across his chest. "So what are we to do with you three dreams?"

Minus stepped forward, head bowed.

"I am ready to accept my punishment, for my part in all of this," he said.

"No," the Day Dreamer said, smiling. "You have restored the balance, and that is enough." He waved his hand, and Minus began to fade from view. "Return to your place among the other dream-selves. Be happy."

Just before he disappeared completely, a huge smile spread across Minus's face. "Thank you," he said, like a faraway echo, and then he was gone.

"And now you two, champions of Planet Drool," the Day Dreamer said, turning to Shark Boy and Lava Girl. "Had Minus and Mr. Electric succeeded in their plans, the Realm of Dreams would have eventually restored itself to its proper order, but only after a generation of nightmares plagued the sleepers of the Waking World. I am just the latest in a long line of Day Dreamers, stretching back to the earliest dreams of mankind, and another would have eventually followed in my footsteps. But you have saved reality many long

years of Darkness, and for that you must be rewarded."

"All I want," Shark Boy said, "is to go back to Earth. I need to look for my father, and now I've finally got a clue where he might be."

The Day Dreamer nodded.

"I can open a doorway for you. Should you ever need to return to the Realm of Dreams, the way back will not be easy, but there are doors, if you know where to find them." The Day Dreamer laid a gentle hand on Shark Boy's shoulder. Though he looked just like a ten-year-old boy, the Day Dreamer seemed in that moment so much older and wiser. "You should pay attention to your anger, Shark Boy. Your strong emotions can be an asset if channeled properly, but if they are allowed to go unchecked, they can have a disastrous effect on you and those around you."

Shark Boy nodded. "I'll try."

"And you, Lava Girl?"

"I'm confused," she answered, pursing her lips. "Now that you've restored everything, shouldn't I have all my memories back? I don't! I remember what I am, but not where I came from."

"I'm afraid that is all there is to remember," the Day Dreamer said. "You are the queen of the city of Vent, one of the Twilight Places, which exists both in the Realm of Dreams and in the Waking World. But I'm sorry to say that even I don't know where you originally came from, nor where you got your powers. It has always been a mystery, like the fate of Shark Boy's father."

Lava Girl put her hands on her hips and raised her head.

"Well, I'm going to find out, sooner or later!"

"You must let me know when you do," the Day Dreamer said, his voice gentle. He looked from Lava Girl to Shark Boy and back. "Well, if there's nothing else

you require, I'll be happy to speed you on your way. Shark Boy to Earth, and Lava Girl back to her subjects in Vent."

Shark Boy looked at Lava Girl, a wide grin spreading across his face.

"Let's go!"

Chapter Twenty

Shark Boy piloted his Sharksub through the dark, murky waters of the ocean's depth. This far down, thousands of feet beneath the waves, the pressure was too great for most sea creatures to survive. On the seafloor, just beneath his submarine, strange little creatures scuttled about, sightless and alien.

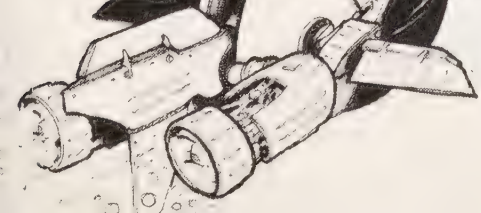
But stranger creatures were ahead. Shark Boy could see a bright light glowing in the distance, cutting through the murk and gloom. As he brought the Sharksub closer, he could see the source.

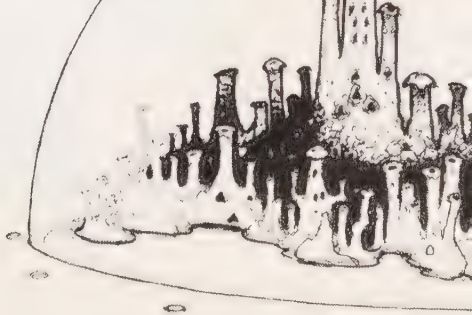
A domed city on the ocean floor, glowing like an underwater star.

The city of Vent, halfway between the worlds of waking and dreams. Lava Girl was its queen. She traveled to and from

the city through the liquid hot magma of the planet itself, since contact with the frigid water would soon put out her fires and rob her of heat and strength. The city gave her a home, and she gave it light and heat in return. If she were ever away for too long, the thermal vents in the ocean floor that gave the city its warmth would cool and stop, and the city would freeze.

From the brightness of the city's glow, Shark Boy could see that Lava Girl was back home. Through the thick transparent dome, he could see the unearthly inhabitants of the city celebrating her return, giant tube worms and strange spidery creatures, beings that could not exist anywhere else in the world. Their queen was back among

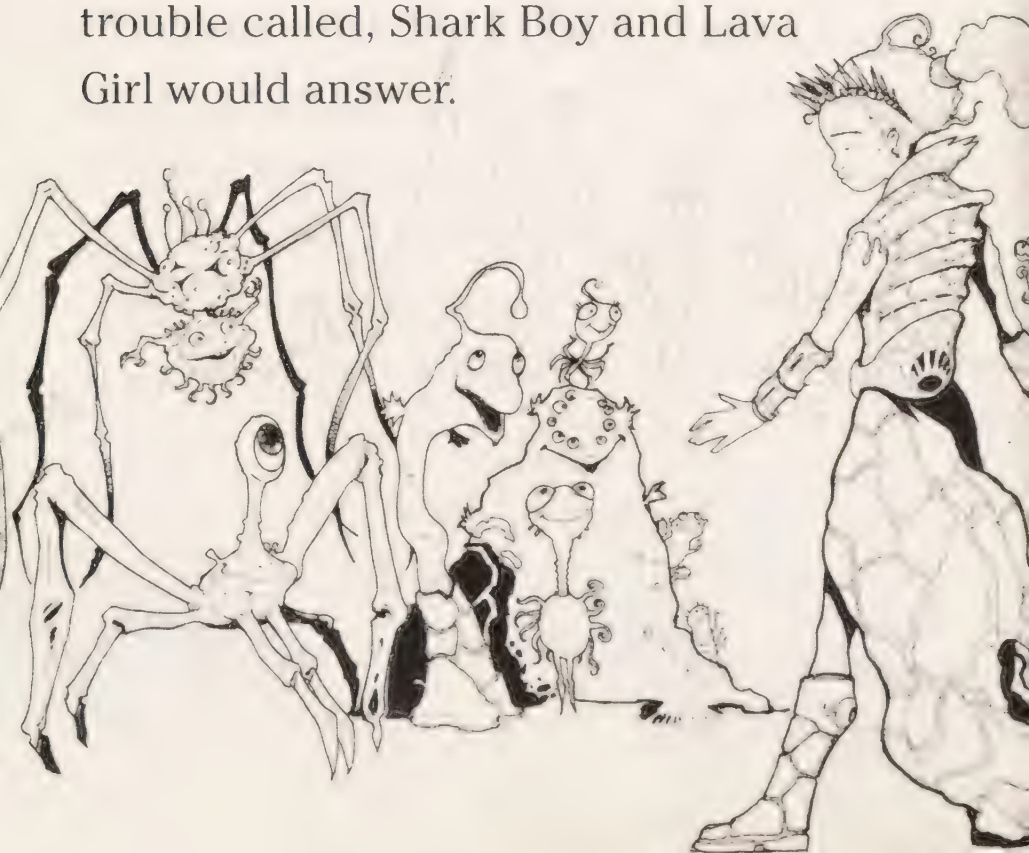




them, and they had reason to celebrate.

Shark Boy smiled. He hoped he would soon have reason to celebrate himself. He finally had a place to begin looking for his father, a trail of clues to follow. And he would find him. No matter what.

Shark Boy turned his Sharksub back towards the murk and gloom, and sped away from the city of Vent. He knew he would see Lava Girl again, eventually. When the Realm of Dreams needed them again, they would be called. And when trouble called, Shark Boy and Lava Girl would answer.



The adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl continue in
Book 2:
Return to Planet Drool

ABOUT ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

Robert Rodriguez loves family and stories, and often puts them together. Growing up in a family of ten kids (!) he started making movies when he was 12 years old, and made an award winning short film called ***Bedhead*** starring his brothers and sisters. In college he drew a comic strip for his school newspaper based on his younger sister. Later, he made the ***Spy Kids*** movies, which had many characters based on his family. He's just finished making ***The Adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl in 3-D***—based on the stories and dreams of his son Racer Max—which introduces audiences to the heroes of Planet Drool.

About Chris Roberson

Chris Roberson used to write just science fiction stories for grown-ups, and even won awards for them, but now that he got the chance to co-write the ***Shark Boy and Lava Girl Adventures***, he thinks he'll be writing more stuff for kids. His first novel, ***Here, There & Everywhere***, is about a girl who gets the ability to travel anywhere in time and space, and older kids who enjoyed this book might want to check it out. Chris and his wife Allison live with their little girl Georgia Rose in a big house filled with lots of books.

ABOUT ALEX TOADER

Alex Toader draws things for a living, sometimes using pen and markers, sometimes brushes, and sometimes a computer and mouse. He's also been known to sculpt maquettes and props, from time to time. His conceptual designs for characters, vehicles, and environments have appeared in movies like the ***Spy Kids*** trilogy and ***The Adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl in 3-D***, and a number of video games. Alex draws all the time, even when he doesn't have to, but on those rare occasions when he's not drawing he's busy playing with his kids.

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The Darkness is spreading
across Planet Drool,
and Shark Boy and Lava Girl
must find the Day Dreamer,
the only being who can stop it.
But the heroes of the Realm of Dreams
have a problem
–they can't remember anything,
not even who they are!
Can they regain their memories
and find the Day Dreamer
before it is too late?

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Ages Seven and Up

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